

**THE HOME UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE**

**CXXIII
DRAMA**

EDITORS OF
**THE HOME UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE**

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· D R A M A

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PREFACE

THIS book is addressed not only to the gentle reader but to the gentle playgoer. In the first place it is a book of the theatre, and therefore it attempts from the outset the rash enterprise of describing one art in terms of another. To portray the character of the theatre in words is as difficult as to convey in words the impression of a painting or a statue or a symphony. Although the drama itself employs words as a means of expression, it also employs graphic symbols that cannot properly be translated into language. It is needless to dispute whether the words or the symbols are the more important, for both are needful. If we follow the pursuit of words alone we shall miss half the pleasure of the theatre and nearly all its movement. On the other hand, if we pursue the intangible realities of drama we reach a sphere of fleeting sensation where words are of little significance. Certainly no book can wholly

recreate the pleasures of the theatre for a reader's benefit. It is doubtful whether any book can bring the æsthetic purpose of the theatre clearly before a reader's mind unless he be also a playgoer, and, moreover, a gentle playgoer who appreciates the nature of the attempted task. The reader, in short, must be prepared to share an experience of art and life. He need not personally be deeply versed in matters of the theatre. The expert and the scholar must give place to the spectator and the listener.

Here, for example, the student will find a summary of dramatic literature that is compressed of necessity into two or three chapters. Much will be taken for granted, but it will not be taken for granted that the reader is familiar with such a literature, or even that he has read a fiftieth part of it. The subject is altogether too vast for such assumptions. Our aim is rather to establish the place of dramatic literature in the theatre as a whole. There are books enough in which dramatists are considered, and the greatest of them have many books to themselves alone. Here it is possible to do no more than consider the dramatist as *dramatis persona*.

The other *dramatis personæ* of the theatre likewise claim their place. But here again it will not be taken for granted that the reader is already familiar with the detailed crafts of acting, stage direction, or scenic design. Our aim is to present the first principles of such crafts in a form that shall appeal, not indeed to the man in the street, but to the playgoer in the pit. We shall seek, as it were, to dramatize the drama, to distribute its varied parts among the varied performers, to rehearse and act the play, and to imagine it worthily mounted. But all these efforts depend upon the help of the willing spectator. His response is the urgent and vital necessity.

There was surely never a time when the interest in drama was more widespread than it is at the present day. Even in the greatest ages of dramatic achievement, when the theatre was the natural vehicle of every poet, the possibilities of response were not so universal in their character. The printed play and the acted play alike are accessible to multitudes. The theatre stands half-conscious of its awakening to general significance. It has many things to remember and some to

forget. Just as the arts were overshadowed by the monastic tradition in the Middle Ages, so that they seldom touched the mind of the common man, so they are still overshadowed in some degree by traditions of social or literary or intellectual superiority. The drama has emancipated itself from dogma, but not wholly from the dogmatists. We shall endeavour to enlist the playgoer, not in the ranks of any particular group of sectarians, but in the lively company of lovers of theatrical art.

ASHLEY DUKES.

London, 1926.

NOTE ON THE REVISED EDITION.

The few changes that have been made (apart from the revised bibliography) relate to the rather confused course of dramatic writing in these last eventful years.

A. D.

London, 1985.

CONTENTS

CHAP		PAGE
	PREFACE	v
I.	THE NATURE OF DRAMA	11
II.	THE VARIETIES OF DRAMA	29
III	THE DRAMATIST I.	62
IV.	THE DRAMATIST II	86
V.	THE ACTOR	116
VI	THE PRODUCER	141
VII	THE SCENE	161
VIII	THE PLAYHOUSE	185
IX.	THE AUDIENCE	198
X.	DRAMA PRESENT AND FUTURE	218
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	246
	INDEX	251

DRAMA

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF DRAMA

DRAMA, in the Greek, signifies action, and the vision of man in movement has animated all dramatic compositions from the earliest times. Of the actual or supposed origins of dramatic art we will speak presently; our immediate theme is the nature of drama. In current language the word is given several more or less kindred meanings, the chief of which naturally embraces the author's creative contribution to dramatic art. There are some indeed who would restrict the definition of drama entirely to the written or spoken word, leaving all the adjuncts of the theatre, such as the actor's performance or the producer's craft, to be considered under their own purely theatrical heading. This is a view at variance alike with the nature of the subject and with

the logic of daily experience. Drama is not only the portrayal of action, but action itself. When we hear that "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give," we think not only of the creations of dramatic poetry, but of all that is visible on the stage. When circumstances in daily life are called "dramatic," we do not mean that they have been invested with any especial poetic meaning by the narrator, but that the manner of their happening seems appropriate to the theatre. The formless tide of human affairs seems suddenly to be gathered into a wave of rhythmic effect. In such phrases as "the drama and contrivance of God's providence" we recognize that the word describes a series of events linked by sublime unity. Drama, in this sense, depends upon the force and fidelity of the image rather than upon any individual agency, however poetic or intellectual, employed in its presentation. It is this larger significance of drama, embodying all the action of the stage, that we shall attempt to consider.

Drama and Theatre are two who should be one. Their union is the task of every stage that is truly awakened to consciousness.

They should be one and yet remain two; a marriage must be sought if they are to beget a true theatrical art. All the allurements expressed in the word theatre—the eager expectancy of the audience and its natural love of colour and movement, the player's swift exaltation, the designer's craft of transient illusion, even the musician's harmonies and the dancer's rhythms—beckon toward the figure we know as drama, who should be the impersonation of ardent conflict but is often the image of intellectual aloofness or stoical indifference. The match is not easily to be arranged, for the minx called Theatre flaunts her paint-box and powder-puff too freely, while the austere grey-beard Drama gathers his dignified robe about him and expresses a conventional distaste for things "theatrical." Grave incompatibilities of temperament are evident at a glance; but unless the union be consummated, neither theatre nor drama can fulfil a natural purpose. A lifeless drama, echoing the small talk of daily currency, has its counterpart in a lifeless theatre whose actors reproduce the gestures of daily commonplace; but a living drama, born of thought and passion and fancy, calls

for a living theatre that shall interpret as well as represent.

To suppose that either drama or theatre can of its own power evoke the offspring of theatrical art is to misconceive the entire collaborative process of the stage. Partial successes they may of themselves accomplish—such flowerings of the individual nature as bachelors or spinsters may always achieve. The printed text of a play may quicken deep responses in the reader's mind; the show of theatrical pageantry alone may arouse the spectator's admiration. It is possible to imagine a revival of poetic drama side by side with an art of presentation sunk in the most commonplace realism. It is equally possible to imagine a theatre seeking inspiration and fantasy in its own nature, and either turning its back upon the playwright altogether or endeavouring to set the impression of style upon a drama that is detached and self-sufficient. Indeed both of these phenomena may be witnessed on the stage of the present day, and a great part of the dusty argument about things theatrical, so baffling to the simple playgoer, arises from the prejudices and misconceptions of the rival parties.

Playwrights, actors, producers, and designers dispute their share in the dramatic spectacle, and sometimes look jealously or mistrustfully upon each other's work. When drama and theatre are truly united, such differences cannot appear.

It should be remembered that the origin of drama lay in performance. The Dionysian rites from which Greek tragedy sprang were musical and religious, but they were also in the deepest sense theatrical. The vision of man in movement was created by hymns and dances celebrating the history of Dionysos in a rhythm appropriate to the passionate nature of his worship. The participation of the poets in this festival came later, and was itself determined by the participation of the tragic chorus. Of the conception of the dramatist as chieftain of the theatre, whose mature and deliberate will should be interpreted by the actors, there was little or no trace in classical times. The tragic playwright was born of the tragic myth. The sorrowful and noble Oedipus, whose errors lead him through pain and misery to an awful enlightenment, was fabled through the generations before his appearance in the

Sophoclean drama. Here the dramatist's voice was but the profoundest expression of the spectator's emotional mood, and every word chanted by his chorus the sincerest performance of a religious rite. The dramatic action which began with the ritual dance turned inward to the soul of man, and the dithyrambs of the singers grew into chants of solitary wisdom and beauty; but through the whole the voice of the multitude was heard. In the "glory of passivity" that illuminates Œdipus, as in the "glory of activity" that radiates from Prometheus, we are aware of the birth of drama from a vast collaborative consciousness.

As with drama, so it was with the theatre. The playhouse was never a temple for the expression of a dramatist's individual message to his audience. The stage was never properly his pulpit; the players were never his acolytes. The woods and mountains formed the earliest theatre, which echoed the wild cries of Mænads and Bacchæ and the shrill notes of the flute. The Greek playhouse, cut in the slope of a hill, was originally designed for the performance of dithyrambic choruses at the festival of Dionysos. The seats were

raised tier upon tier in horseshoe formation around the circular dancing-place (*orchestra*), in the midst of which stood the altar of the god. It was only later, when the dithyrambic choruses had developed into the drama, that the proscenium and stage proper were added. They were built on the circumference of the *orchestra* farthest from the spectators, at such a distance as to permit a full view from every part of the theatre. The true and original stage, however, was the dancing-place, at least three-quarters of which lay in the midst of the audience. The Roman theatre was already semicircular in plan, and therefore less disposed than the Greek to include the scene of action within its auditorium; moreover the orchestral space included seats for distinguished spectators, who came to be seen as well as to see, and who thus encroached upon the ground of the spectacle.

The history of the theatre shows a gradual and progressive recession of the stage from the audience. In the beginnings of the Elizabethan playhouse there was doubtless some tendency to revert to the Greek model of a stage surrounded by spectators, since the structure of the inn-yard where plays were

performed was particularly suited to such a form of presentation. In the course of time, however, the Elizabethan theatre settled down to an architectural plan in which the platform or "apron stage" projected about one-third or one-half of its area into the audience, the remainder being withdrawn behind the proscenium. Finally, the complete recession of stage from audience is seen in the theatre of the present day, where the proscenium arch is regarded as a frame enclosing a dramatic picture, and the actor is separated from the spectator by the fall of the curtain.

There is no more illuminating study in the history of drama than this recession of the platform of action. It is remarkable indeed that it should have been accompanied by the gradual rise and enhancement of the dramatist's individual position in the theatre. In general we may say that as the dramatist made himself master of the stage, his platform was withdrawn from immediate contact with his audience. The present-day naturalistic drama, in which the proscenium opening is supposed to represent an imaginary "fourth wall" of the apartment visible on the stage,

marks the complete separation between the parties. At the same time, by a curious paradox, there was never a period of theatrical history when the dramatist's use of the stage as an individual platform was so general as at present, or was received with such widespread interest. In addressing multitudes, the dramatist has removed his chosen pulpit to the remotest circumference of the popular temple. Now that this logical extremity has been reached, it is natural that men of the theatre should begin to consider the possibilities of some new development of the structure of the playhouse, if not of a return to the older traditional form. In any case it is well that we should bear in mind the origin of the stage in the midst of the audience, as a symbol of popular participation in the festival of drama.

The art of acting likewise was of ritual origin. In the earliest times, the actor was either a singer or a dancer taking part in the Dionysian festivals. When the time came for him to represent the characters of the dramatic poets, and thus to exchange self-expression for conscious imagery, he was furnished with an appropriate costume and

also with a mask. Even at the Dionysian revels the faces of the performers are said to have been coloured by dregs of wine, rudely embellished by leaves, or partly covered with bark; but the invention of masks of painted fabric, which came into use with the development of Greek tragedy, made it possible to conceal the actor's visible personality beneath a semblance of formal character. Such concealment was especially needful since women's characters were played by men, and the actors doubled their parts freely. The principal players from the time of Sophocles numbered only three, who had to represent all the personages of the drama, changing their costumes and masks during the intervals created by the chants of the chorus. Conventional colourings of the hair, as well as the expression of the painted features, distinguished the various types of character. The stature of tragic personages was heightened by the wearing of the high shoe (*kothornos*). The masks of comedy, later introduced, were adapted to the livelier nature of the dramatic action. They were likewise much more varied, as in the comedies of Aristophanes. Throughout the history of Greek drama it appears

that the actor's craft was restricted to the play of voice and gesture, both of which were considerably formalized and stiffened by the exigencies of the costume that was worn. In the height of the Athenian period the actors were known as artists of Dionysos, and they formed guilds with special privileges, presided over by a priest of their patron deity. The earliest touring companies, consisting of three actors, a manager, and a flute-player, were sent out by these guilds to the larger cities at the seasons of festival. The chorus, on such occasions, was furnished by local citizens.

It was not until the rise of the Roman theatre that the personality of the actor was definitely identified, in the accepted sense, with the character of his part. The number of actors was varied by the Romans to meet the requirements of the cast. Companies of players were hired both for public festivals and private entertainments given by rich patrons. They were generally freedmen or slaves, and hence arose (in part at least) the stigma with which the profession was technically branded. Wigs were commonly worn and the face was painted. Women's parts, as in Greece, were originally played by men,

but women appeared first in mimes and under the decadence also in comedies. The status of actors was much improved in Rome by the influences of Hellenic education, and prominent players were not only received by the great men of their day, but made considerable sums by their profession. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the art of acting underwent very little essential change, though its complexion was inclined continually to a greater degree of naturalism. This tendency was fostered by the progress of mechanical invention and the increasingly lifelike character of the background before which the player appeared. In the late nineteenth century, for example, the introduction of electric lighting gave an impulse to naturalistic acting which was almost as great as that already given by the conventions of the dramatist. If the actor now cherishes the symbol of the mask as the badge of his profession, it is surely not from any resemblance between his own make-up and the historic covering of his features, but perhaps from a consciousness that the origin of his art lay in the impersonal performance of a religious and collective ritual.

The appeal to the eye is evidently an essential of drama. If the original dramatic scene was the amphitheatre of nature, the earliest Greek backgrounds set within the playhouses of wood and stone were of the formal character we should expect, considering the formalities of mask and costume. In front of the wall at the rear of the stage was placed a movable screen, painted with the scene of the action. The classical tragedy called for nothing more than the painting of a palace frontage with three doors. Revolving stands on either side of the raised stage (where alone the principal characters appeared) sometimes showed panoramic views of the city or country where the scene was supposed to be laid. Crude thunder-boxes and other stage devices were employed. A flight of steps hidden from the spectator, and leading downward from the stage, was sometimes used for the entry of ghosts and kindred apparitions. An imperial love of splendour and pageantry was reflected on the Roman stage, where the scenery was rather more elaborate without differing essentially from the Greek model. The mediæval mysteries and miracle plays were mounted with the

simplicity appropriate to their themes. On the Continent of Europe the Renaissance brought a flowering of scenic pageantry to the stage, but the Elizabethans in England, like the Chinese dramatists and players of the present day, were very largely content with symbolical or imaginary scenery, aided by the illusions of the spoken word or the habitual conventions of the audience. The pictorial scene as it is now understood dates from the development of the pictorial frame formed by the proscenium arch of the theatre.

Since we shall have occasion to study the share of the producer or director in the creation of drama, it may be worth while to add a few words regarding his origin. The Athenian dramatists were not permitted to hand their tragedies or comedies directly to the actors, and few of them directed their performance in person. If they were fortunate, their part (like that of the modern playwright) was to receive the laurels in the presence of the assembled multitude. The personage who supervised the whole production was the *archon*. To him the poets brought their plays for acceptance, and to him they applied for the needful chorus.

There can be little doubt that the *archon* exercised the sternest discipline in the Greek playhouse. With the passage of time his priestly character was modified, but some such functionary of the theatre edited the later Attic comedies and introduced their frequent topical allusions. In the Roman theatre the producer purchased his repertory of plays from poets and performed them at his own charge. During the Middle Ages he was the showman of the morality and mystery play. In the Elizabethan theatre he was the manager, who moulded plays to suit the capacity of his stage and the taste of his public. Sometimes he was part author of the piece, and a competent company could even evolve a play at rehearsal under his direction. Later he was identified with the stage manager, who settled the practical details of production and left the play to take care of itself. With the advent of modern naturalism, he became the chief illusionist of the theatre, whose task it was to convince the spectator of the lifelike character of the scene as represented. At the present day he is not only the conductor of a temperamental orchestra of players, but

greater than the various crafts of the playwright, the actor, the producer and the designer, since it embraces them all in a common purpose. This is not so much a dogma as a necessity of dramatic life. The partners of the theatre choose their own calling and accept its nature. If they seek expression in the playhouse, they find co-operation. If they look for their own art, they find it indissolubly bound up with the art of others. No author can justly say that he has seen his own play performed in a theatre, and no actor can justly claim that he has played his own part. Nor can either of them hold that their work is accomplished until response is quickened in their audience. If playgoing is no longer a popular ritual, it is at least a conscious social act. The bond between drama and its audience is indestructible. Plays truly live in performance alone. And just as the single play derives its breath from the gathering of spectators, so the drama as a whole reflects the manifold gestures of experience. In the scrutiny of this art we turn page after page of social history, each reflecting some movement, whether tragical or joyous, of the spirit of mankind.

CHAPTER II

THE VARIETIES OF DRAMA

THE various types of drama, such as tragedy, comedy or farce, were not imposed upon the theatre by the deliberate will of the dramatist, but were rather reflections of the spectator's mood and echoes of his voice. They were indeed ennobled or enlivened by the poet's inspiration, but their springs lay deep in folklore. In *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* Nietzsche studies the profound opposition between the Apollonian, intellectual, order-loving element and the Dionysian, lyrical, ecstatic element, which were continually warring in the Greek spirit. He holds that these two elements constitute two separate worlds of art, which may be imagined respectively as "dream-land" and "drunkenness." The beautiful character of a dream-world, in which, for example, gods appear to happy mortals, is pre-supposed by all plastic art and by the

greater part of poetry. Apollo is the divine image of the individual man who stands calm and philosophical amid the buffetings of a world of sorrows. Dionysos, on the other hand, is the symbol of ecstatic revelry, merging all conscious and subjective feelings in a wave of self-forgetfulness. His kingdom suggests no thoughts of calm beauty, but is rather peopled by riotous figures, inflamed by passion, who live for the intoxication of the passing hour. Both of these elements were present in the tragic chorus of Greek drama, as they were present in the mind of the dramatist. The actors of the chorus, grouped in the orchestral space, observed the characters of the tragedy, who were raised on the stage above them and subjected to the blows of a mysterious and inexorable Fate. Philosophy bade them admire the sagacity and patience with which the misfortunes of the protagonists were endured; but lyrical frenzy urged them to proclaim themselves fellow-sufferers and to excite the minds of their hearers to such a pitch that they should regard the tragic hero no longer as an unfortunate fellow-man, but as a visionary figure born of their own ecstasy. The oppo-

sition of these rival impulses is the essence of all drama. The birth of tragedy is therefore traced to the tragic chorus, and to the chorus alone, in whose minds and hearts the true drama was played, while masked symbols of the conflict were in visible motion on the stage.

This view of the origin of tragic drama is more in harmony with the spirit of the theatre than the rival explanations that have been offered by various scholars—for example, the political view that the chorus embodied the democratic element in opposition to the royal element on the stage, or the sentimental view that the chorus represented the “ideal spectator.” To the dramatist (and not only to the lawgiver) all men are equal. To the dramatist (and not only to the theatrical manager) all spectators are ideal.

The name of tragedy, signifying “the goat song,” recalls the hymn sung by the dancing chorus at the sacrifice of the sacred animal on the altar of Dionysos. Tradition ascribes the earliest formal tragedies to Thespis, a poet and actor of Icaria in the sixth century B.C. In these compositions a leader emerged from the chorus and represented various

characters by the aid of masks. The way to true dramatic dialogue was prepared by the appearance of an actor (*protagonistes*) who delivered recitations either in monologue or in exchanges with the chorus-leader and his followers. The natural source of the dramatist's inspiration was found in the tragic myths surrounding ancient figures of Greek history, both divine and human.

ÆSCHYLUS, born in 525 B.C., was the creator of classical tragedy, not only by reason of the sublime and majestic character of his writings, but also through his contributions to stagecraft. He added a second actor (*deuteragonistes*) to the first, and subordinated the chorus to the dramatic dialogue. He rehearsed and acted in his own plays, brought in new masks and costumes for the players, and developed the decorative resources of the stage. At the same time, coming of noble stock, he was a warrior and a courtier. In 468, at the contest of the tragic poets, he was vanquished by the youthful Sophocles, thirty years his junior; but he vanquished him in turn the next year with the tetralogy of which the *Seven against Thebes*, one of his few surviving plays, formed

a part. One of his trilogies, the *Oresticæ*, composed about 458, has been preserved in full. It consists of the *Agamemnon*, dealing with the murder of the hero on his return from Troy; *The Choephoræ*, named from the chorus of captive Trojan women offering libations at Agamemnon's tomb; and *The Eumenides*, in which Orestes, after his revenge upon Ægisthus and Clytemnestra, is pursued by the Furies and acquitted by the court of Athens. The conception of the poet is infused with a passion for justice and a sincere piety. The gods are always regarded as powers working in the interest of morality and order. The *Prometheus Bound*, part of another Auchylean trilogy the remainder of which is lost, envelops the hero in the radiance of the Dionysian spirit, while it likewise represents him as filled with a devoted love of mankind. In his later plays Æschylus accepted the addition of the third actor (*trilagonistes*) to his cast.

SOPHOCLES (born about 495 B.C.), who made so glorious an appearance on the stage as the friendly rival and conqueror of Æschylus, was a musician and actor from his youth. He was less of a courtier than Æschylus, but

no less a man of action, since he served as a general in the Peloponnesian war, and also held a priestly office. As a dramatic poet he was most prolific, and more than a hundred of his plays are known by name, though only seven (precisely the number of those left to us by Æschylus) have been preserved complete. Sophocles first introduced the third actor to tragedy, and in his later pieces even added a fourth. He increased both the numbers and the dramatic significance of the chorus, and made numerous improvements in scenery and decoration. It had been the practice of Æschylus to follow one story through three successive plays, but Sophocles made of every tragedy a separate work of art. Moreover, the motives of his action are derived from the nature of the characters, who are drawn with subtlety as well as power. In the noble drama of the *Œdipus Tyrannus* the king stands forth as a figure of traditional legend; but when towards the close he appears blinded on the stage, and narrates the dreadful fate of Jocasta and his own inevitable self-punishment, we are already deeply touched by the high beauty of his nature, and we share the conviction of the

chorus that a miracle of transfiguration is taking place before our eyes. Then indeed we feel with Nietzsche that the character "was understood by Sophocles as the noble man, who in spite of his wisdom was destined to error and misery, but nevertheless by his extraordinary sufferings ultimately exercised a magical, wholesome influence on all around him." The *Œdipus at Colonus*, a variant of the myth, shows the hero coming to Colonus at the bidding of Apollo, and finding there, in the sanctuary of the goddesses of vengeance, the desired peace of the grave. In the Sophoclean tragedy the fable of Œdipus appears to human eyes the strangest of legal knots, inextricably entangled by the crimes of murder and incest; but the whole is unravelled by the luminous perception of the poet working through the ecstatic consciousness of the chorus as spectator. It may be noticed also that Sophocles, more than either Æschylus or Euripides, succeeded in giving nobility to the female character. His attitude towards popular religion is always reverent, and we may believe that the simplicity of his writing reflected his own nature. He was generally held to be a man

beloved by the gods, and Æsculapius, who may have been his patron, is said to have granted him health and vigour to a ripe age.

The dramas of EURIPIDES (born about 484 B.C.), the third great master of Greek tragedy, are sharply distinguished from those of his predecessors by their lesser grandeur and greater shrewdness. As a poet Euripides is first of all the mouthpiece of conscious knowledge. As a thinker he is primarily a critic of the accepted order, to whom, for example, the gods are fallible and Fate is accidental or perverse. As a dramatist he is rather inclined to the natural study of man than to the creation of heroic characters. Without accepting the view that Euripides debased tragedy by bringing the spectator upon the stage, it may be said that his heroes are not raised conspicuously above the level of ordinary life. It is for this reason that he is often paradoxically styled a "modern." His use of the classical myths for his own intellectual purpose, together with the clarity and liveliness of his writing, made him the centre of controversy throughout his lifetime, as well as in succeeding generations.

His poetic genius and dramatic craft remain unchallenged, though he undoubtedly sought to undermine the fabric of the old tragedy by opposing to it a conception of his own. He is said to have been a friend of Socrates, and he was doubtless keenly interested in the affairs of his day. He was reputed personally to be aloof and austere. Of his tragedies, nineteen have come down to us. There is no need here to dwell upon them, for they are treated in another volume of this series, *Euripides and his Age*, by Professor Gilbert Murray, to whom we likewise owe the English translations that are often performed at the present day.

In seeking a definition of the tragic spirit in drama it is needless to look beyond the work of these three dramatists. To say that a tragedy is a dramatic composition in which the diction is elevated and the catastrophe melancholy is only to borrow phrases from the dictionary that comes first to hand. The pulse of tragedy quickens our common spirit; the breath of tragedy purifies our common mind. Even in an age that produces no tragedies, the sense of this inspired and deathless art lies deep-rooted in our con-

sciousness, and we echo the longing of Milton :

Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by.

Roman tragedy was much inferior to the Greek, although it was formed entirely upon the original model and largely derived from Hellenic myth. The tragedies of Seneca, themselves borrowed from the Greek, influenced the earliest French classical writers and were universally studied in the time of the Renaissance. They are not to be compared, however, with the greatest Athenian works. Nor can we feel that the tragic compositions of the moderns, even those of Shakespeare and Marlowe, Corneille and Racine, with their great individual beauty, add anything to the essential spirit of tragedy as it was defined by the ancients. The conception of fate is changed in the works of the moderns, but the reality of fateful experience remains the same. Pity and terror still hold their supreme sway over the mind.

Comedy, like tragedy, began in the festivals of Dionysos. Its name is derived from the *komos*, a merry chant of the revellers, whose

pranks were no doubt often worked up into the nature of farce. The comic treatment of mythology appealed to some irreverent spirits at a very early date, but comedy was never considered seriously as a literary form until the time of the Persian wars, when it found a welcome in Athens. Its form was then moulded on the lines of tragedy, and eventually it received a like recognition from the State. It was very natural that the Old Comedy, as it was known in the first period, should lend itself to the cruder sort of satire. Springing as it did from boisterous horseplay, it was a tempting channel for personal abuse. Cratinus, an older contemporary of Aristophanes, gave it a marked political turn. The widest licence was permitted to the comic poets, whose plays abounded in coarse allusions as well as in rough buffoonery. At the same time their language was always carefully chosen, and the freedom of their metres encouraged a livelier play of fancy than was usually allowed to the tragedians. Further, the frank and impulsive character of the Athenians offered boundless opportunities of comic observation. The city, if not the whole nation, possessed the delightful ability to

laugh at itself without affectation or egoism. Thus the Old Comedy, originating in the rude outbreaks of high spirits of which fortunately the best of men are capable, became a kind of safety-valve for the nobility of the Hellenic nature, and ultimately took its rightful place as a scourge of vice and folly.

The dialogue of comedy was mostly written in iambic verses, and the chorus numbered twenty-four performers. From time to time the poet used the chorus as a mouthpiece for topical allusions quite unconnected with the plot. In the *parabasis* the chorus even turned from the stage towards the audience, and delivered a commentary written for the occasion. Poets competed with one another in comedy, as in tragedy, at the Dionysian festivals.

The admitted master of the Old Comedy is ARISTOPHANES, who was born in 444 B.C., and was thus a younger contemporary of Euripides. In Plato's *Symposium* he is numbered among the noblest of men. It is certain that in his character wisdom and fancy were unusually blended. If he ridiculed Euripides with extreme harshness, it was doubtless from

the revolt of his own classical instincts against what must have seemed to him a betrayal of the classical tradition. To the comic poets the "good old times" are generally the best, and in their view artistic heresies are as tiresome as social innovations. Of some forty comedies composed by Aristophanes, eleven have come down to us complete. Among them are *The Clouds*, his most famous piece, which, however, only won the third prize in its year, perhaps because it attacked Socrates and the sophists; *The Birds*, which is considered to be his happiest composition; *The Lysistrata* or *Lysistrata*, which describes a strike of wives designed to bring about peace; and *The Frogs*, in which the decline of tragic art is laid at the door of Euripides and the new tragedy. Incidentally Aristophanes is largely responsible for the traditional libel upon Euripides as a "woman-hater." His comedies were in the main addressed to the Athenian audience, and have little intrinsic interest for later generations, though they are often performed to this day in seats of learning.

The decay of the Old Comedy is attributed to the Peloponnesian War, which drained the

Athenian resources and made the upkeep of the chorus an expensive luxury. In its place arose the Middle Comedy, which flourished from about 400 to 380 B.C., but is more remarkable for the number of its poets than for their inspiration. Burlesque was the favourite style of this period, and the typical characters were drawn from everyday life. The New Comedy, which followed, was equally prolific. It was marked chiefly by the strengthening of plot and the more faithful study of character. MENANDER, born in 342 B.C., was undoubtedly the greatest of the New Comedians, but not one of his plays has survived in the original. Transcripts of his comedies, in which many subtleties are doubtless lost, are handed down to us in various Latin works. Altogether the Romans took the New Comedy as their classical model, and it was developed both by Terence and Plautus, of whom the former is thin and the latter generally coarse and farcical. The comedies of Terence, in turn, served as model to Hrotswitha, the early mediæval nun whose naive compositions are one of the curiosities of dramatic literature.

The Indian drama, like the Greek, origin-

ated in the union of dance and song at religious festivals. Although it began nearly a thousand years after the great period of the Athenian theatre, it is believed to be entirely of native growth. The tragic conception of the Greeks is unknown in the Far East, and the motive of romantic love plays a greater part in the theatre. Among the Indian classical dramas that have been translated into English are the *Sakuntala* and *The Toy Cart*. The Chinese drama proper arose as late as the thirteenth century, and its aims are generally held to be moral rather than religious or poetic. All the virtues are glorified in its traditional pieces, whose dialogue is often improvised or greatly altered in the spoken version. Romantic passages are sometimes sung by one of the leading actors. The scenery is elementary and conventional. Japanese drama has hitherto been largely imported, and based upon Chinese models. The theatre suffered from the contempt in which it was long held by the Japanese nobility; but of late it has risen in the general esteem.

The sources of drama, therefore, appear always to have been religious and communal,

and the great changes which have been manifested in its form represent changes in the nature of human society as well as in the mind of the dramatist. The form of tragedy has been preserved, upon the whole, in its traditional shape. Comedy has gained much in subtlety with the passage of centuries, and has lost nothing in wit. The Renaissance in particular encouraged not only the study of the classical models, but the growth of a true comedy of art and manners. It is a far cry from the *Clouds* of Aristophanes to such masterpieces as the *Misanthrope* or *Tartuffe* of Molière, the *Way of the World* of Congreve, or the *Country Wife* of Wycherley. The growth of faithful observation, however, has brought its own dangers to the theatre. When apparent fidelity to nature reaches its logical extreme, as in the characteristic modern comedy of French or English commerce, the spirit of the muse is entirely dissipated, and there remains little to admire beyond the playwright's ingenuity and his command of verbal humour. While comedy was artificial, its authors still ranked themselves among the poets; but now that it is natural, verse and rhythm alike have fled

from the stage. Perhaps in this respect drama has been influenced by the novel, which began as a species of picaresque comedy or romance, following the career of some hero from his birth to his marriage, and later developed into a more or less faithful transcript of everyday experience or a critical commentary upon life. To the modern mind it seems natural that comedy or drama in general should hold the same position in the theatre as is held by the novel in narrative literature. The narrative form of plays has certainly been modified by the example of the novel.

The chief historical link between the drama of ancient and modern times lay in some form of pantomime. Under the Romans, the name of *pantomimus* (the all-imitator) was borne by the actor himself. The popularity of the dumb-show was fostered by the great size of the Roman playhouses, where it was easier to see than to hear. The mimic actors wore masks and relied chiefly on the play of the hands and fingers. Pantomimic shows were condemned by the early Christian writers, in whose time women had already begun to appear in them. The form endured

as long as the ascendancy of paganism, and when eventually the troupes were dispersed they became the natural parents of the mediæval strolling players. The minstrels, troubadours, and other singers likewise helped to give dramatic shape to popular legend.

A special place in dramatic history is occupied by the Italian improvised comedy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which took shape in the *commedia dell'arte* (comedy of masks), presenting a series of more or less stereotyped characters and situations linked together by the intrigues of Harlequin. As its name implies, this was a comedy of the theatre rather than of the dramatist, and it was the forerunner not only of the drama of the age of Goldoni, but of all the harlequinades and modern pantomimes. Harlequin is supposed to have been named after the devil Alichino in Dante's *Inferno*. He was masked, dressed in tight parti-coloured clothes, and armed with a wooden sword with which he played tricks to divert the spectators. This lively and malicious personage danced his way into all the theatres of Europe, accompanied by his companions of the harlequinade. We may reasonably regard him as a

transformation wrought by the Renaissance in the stock character of the Devil, who appeared complete with horns, tail, and hoofs in the mediæval mysteries, to the music of popular laughter. A harlequinade was for many decades a traditional part of the modern pantomime.

The comedy of manners is essentially a document of social history, owing its inspiration partly to the elegance surrounding the life of courts and courtiers, and partly to the general spread of cultivated taste, but in even greater measure to the modern growth of equality between the sexes. Comedies of manners are often licentious and sometimes cruel; but nearly always they are graced by the characters of wise and witty women who are more than a match for their men in the subtleties of conversation and the arts of intrigue. It is this spirited independence that makes the women of Molière or Congreve appear more modern than the heroines of sentimental present-day comedy. Further, the comedy of manners marks a definite stepping-stone in the rise of the dramatist. It imposes a crystalline form, a precise dialogue, and a limited imaginative survey.

There are not (as there were in the buffooneries of the mediæval or Elizabethan stage) several different ways of performance open to the producer of the comedy of manners. There is only one way, which may be called the dramatist's way. We begin to be aware of the playwright as autocrat of the theatre. The actor's scope is correspondingly narrowed, while the subtleties of his part are sometimes enriched. Here are one or two only of the numerous reactions of the comedy of manners upon the theatre. If it sometimes degenerates into a comedy of bad manners, that is the fault of the playwright and not of the form.

Farce may be described as comedy broadened at the base. The earliest comedies, and even the plays of Aristophanes, were largely farcical in character. The comic mask itself suggested breadth of humour. The later Roman comedies and mimes were in reality popular farces, and a grotesque element entered into most of the mediæval mysteries, however religious their theme. For the Italians and Elizabethans there was no clear boundary between farce and comedy. The shorter pieces of Molière abound in farcical incident. Later came the farce of pure situation and

with it the logic which decrees that however complicated the tangle of mistaken identity, and however preposterous the incidents of the piece, they must necessarily follow from a single wild assumption. In this sense a good farce, whatever its subject, has a certain mathematical symmetry of its own. Farce transports us into a never-never land of the theatre, and inspires a longing to inhabit, if only for two or three hours, the breathless and exuberant world created by a playwright's ingenuity.

A kindred form to that of farce is burlesque, in which the English have always excelled. Burlesque is the natural parent of what is now called musical comedy, and also of the *revue*, which has been borrowed from France and happily acclimatized in English-speaking countries. The light operas of Gilbert and Sullivan are first-rate examples of burlesque. The modern pantomime, founded upon some well-known nursery tale, falls within the same category, though it may not possess the same quality of wit. In great measure the art of the music-hall or *vaudeville* is likewise an art of burlesque.

The nature of melodrama has been changed

since the name was invented to describe high-flown and improbable pieces more or less accompanied by music. The true melodrama was very popular in the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century, but the music gradually dropped out and the description has since served to cover almost all plays with startling incidents and thrilling or romantic conclusions. Certain moral standards (often absent in farce or comedy) are always observed in melodrama. Virtue is linked with poverty, and vice with wealth. The *dramatis personæ* are the stock figures of traditional comedy moulded to appeal to the popular imagination. Wearers of the King's uniform and fair-haired maidens bear an excellent character. Baronets with hunting-crops and dark ladies in picture hats embody the spirit of all-but-triumphant malice. Humble domesticity is represented by the father and mother of the heroine, respectively sententious and tearful. A pair of low-comedy characters, such as a sailor and chambermaid, complete the cast and serve as lively chorus. Although the songs of melodrama have vanished, the whole remains a dramatic version of the popular street ditty. A more sophisticated

form of melodrama is the detective play, in which the solution of some elaborate mystery of crime is withheld from the audience until the fall of the final curtain.

We owe the dramatic form called the history, ranking beside tragedy and comedy, mainly to Shakespeare's example. His sources of inspiration, notably Holmshed's *Chronicles*, offered many subjects that were best treated in the shape of the "Life and Death" rather than in the traditional tragic or comic manner. Shakespeare revelled in the freedom of construction offered by the dramatic history. The character of Falstaff is much more finely drawn in *King Henry IV* than in the definitely comic *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and throughout the histories there is an exuberance of native genius quick with the spirit of the English countryside. In the hands of lesser writers the history has been too often a vehicle for empty historical pageantry; but in our own day the form has been very widely used for purposes of biographical drama, and the fashion of the chronicle play has thus been at least temporarily revived.

Very nearly akin to the history or chronicle is the didactic play, which takes, as it were,

a subjective view of historical characters, and uses them to express the opinions or point the moral of the author. An example springs to mind in *Saint Joan*, where history is rationalized down to the last line of stage direction. A chronicle play of this kind is a variant of the modern social drama, which is sometimes called the "social indignation drama" from its spirit of revolt against constituted authority or protest against social injustice. The social playwrights arose in great force, especially on the European stage, towards the end of the nineteenth century, and their influence has been so strong that a very large number of modern plays now fall within the nondescript category, being neither tragedies nor comedies, but simple representations of life as it is seen by the dramatist.

The social drama often does what Euripides was reproached with doing; that is to say, it brings the spectator in the guise of the common man on to the stage. To the Hellenic mind such a proceeding was a breach of the canons of æsthetics. The common man, according to the classical critics, had no part in the theatre save as spectator. From the nature of his being he could never be made

a heroic figure. No poetry worthy of the name could be put into his mouth. His appearance in drama was bound to debase its character. Not that any reflection was cast upon the spectator as a citizen; the objection was taken solely to his appearance as a dramatic personage. From the standpoint of art his emotions were regarded as negligible. This was the point of view, not of an arrogant aristocracy of birth or intellect, but of arbiters of taste who held dramatic law to be inexorable in its exclusions. Royal and priestly figures held the stage, not by reason of their rank, but from their character as symbols of human exaltation. When such figures as retainers or shepherds were introduced into the action, they were themselves transfigured, as it were, by their participation in the poetic spectacle. The audience no longer thought of them as retainers or shepherds, but as divine instruments of justification or vengeance. Ordinary life had no existence as a dramatic subject. If any interpretation were needed of the events that were passing on the stage, it was to be furnished by the chorus. The part of the ordinary citizen was to sit and contemplate characters of extraordinary importance.

There is still much to be said for this argument. All dramatists of true distinction create distinguished characters. Ibsen, to whom the nondescript social drama owes its original impulse, was by no means a student of the common man. On the contrary, his personages are most uncommon types, carefully chosen from the herd of humanity. It is needless to point to the fantastic and brilliant individuals whom Bernard Shaw presents under the plea of a scientific study of human nature. The drama of the common man, generally speaking, is the drama of the common mind. That is the valid criticism of a great part of our present-day social drama. It takes shape as a "slice of life," so-called, because it has no certainty of form or direction.

Religious drama was perhaps the mediæval equivalent of social drama, with the difference that it voiced the sentiment of the spectator instead of the mind of the playwright. The earliest religious plays of the Church were no doubt liturgical, like the plays of ancient Greece, and they also were reserved for performance at seasonal festivals. Most towns of importance, both in England and

abroad, had their own mysteries or miracle plays; and these were performed by the town guildsmen in cycles, as at Chester and Coventry. The scenes were drawn from Old or New Testament history, and many of them were very nearly akin to those of the Passion Play which is still celebrated every ten years at Ober-Ammergau in Bavaria. Certain miracle plays even survived the Reformation, but Protestantism gave a warmer approval to the morality play, which was ethical rather than mystical and dealt with the adventures of allegorical personages such as Everyman striding through a world of temptations. In Roman Catholic countries miracle plays are popular to this day, though they are mainly restricted to the religious narrative and shorn of the boisterous and grotesque elements that delighted the spectators at the mediæval fair.

The masque (or mask) was an entertainment very popular in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it became the favourite form of private theatricals. Essentially it was imitated from the Italian allegorical pageants and inspired by the general love of royal processions and such

festive ceremonials. Architects like Inigo Jones lent their talents to the decoration of the masque. Ben Jonson gave literary graces to this form, but by the time of Milton's *Comus* it was already passing out of fashion. The modern historical pageant is a revival of the masque representing scenes of national or civic history. The ballets of the French court were more nearly akin to the masque than to ballet in the present-day sense of the word.

We have now glanced at most of what may be called the by-ways of drama, as distinct from the highroads of tragedy and comedy established by the ancients. In every art it may be said that the appearance of new forms is a necessity of progress; and drama in particular, representing man in movement, must shadow forth his more trivial and habitual as well as his sublimer gestures. It is nevertheless true that the greatest creations of drama are moulded upon the classical form. The best tragedies and comedies will outlive many generations of nondescript plays. Indeed, some examples of the modern "drama of ideas" are likely to survive not because of their subject-matter, but because of their

form, which (often in spite of the playwright's intention) approximates to the traditional model. There is no escape from the plastic necessity which the theatre imposes upon poet and actor alike. The movement of drama spells harmony as surely as the movement of the dance. Men who walk like gods before their fellow-men must walk divinely. To every actor worthy of the name the consciousness of this dramatic movement is second nature. In each tone and gesture he sets a mask upon the face of the reality he represents. So it must be with the dramatic author who seeks expression through the art of others.

Many writers have sought to establish formal doctrines of dramatic construction on the basis of this inward harmony of drama. The doctrine of the dramatic unities, for example, is traced to Aristotle's analysis of tragedy in his *Poetics*. They are defined as the unities of place, of time, and of action. The first decrees that the dramatic scene shall not be changed essentially during the course of the play; the second, that the events shall occur within the space of twenty-four hours; and the third, that all the incidents and

speeches shall be subordinated to the main argument. Of these the unity of action is the most important from the standpoint of dramatist and actor alike. The other unities were convenient bye-laws of the Athenian theatre, but the discipline they impose may be valuable to playwrights of every age. Other things being equal, it is always better to minimize the changes of scene and to reduce as far as possible the intervals that are supposed to elapse outside the visible movement.

The unity of action is not so much a dogma of the theatre as a statement of all that distinguishes a play from a narrative and drama from life. The unity is crystallized in the shape of the "plot" which engages the interest of the audience and at the same time defines its boundaries. A good dramatic plot is an interpretation as well as an invention. It was held by the ancients that the plot should be developed along regular lines, and these are still essentially unchanged. The first stage of the play is naturally the "introduction," which brings the chief characters before the audience and explains their relation to each other. Here already the dramatist's craft must present a narrative in

the form of a conflict of wills and personalities. It is not enough to tell the story to the audience; its effect must be presented. The action proceeds through a phase of intensive growth (sometimes called the "tying of the knot") to the "climax" in the later middle portion of the drama, where the inevitable conflict reaches its height. Thence it advances through the "fall" or reaction to the "catastrophe" which (in the tragic play) arouses the deepest sentiment of pity. Prologues and epilogues, although legitimate forms of dramatic presentation, stand outside the action as a whole. Sudden turns in the movement of the drama may be provoked by the appearance of characters bearing unexpected tidings. A complete reversal of mental attitude or outward fortune may thus be secured, with a heightening of dramatic effect. Such devices were set forth and prescribed in the writings of the classical critics, not merely as expedients of dramatic ingenuity, but as æsthetic necessities of the theatre.

In other words, a play has a rhythmic movement that may legitimately be called musical. In the introduction and development of the theme, in the rise to the climax,

in the fall towards the close, in every *reprise* of the original motive, we are conscious of a harmonious composition. The ancient dramaturgists expressed in their "poetics" a translation of the musical spirit into the verbal form.

The dramatic unities have repeatedly been defied by great writers, and notably by Shakespeare. At the same time they have been too slavishly observed by the modern exponents of the "well-made play," who drew their inspiration from the ancients at second hand through the medium of the French classical dramatists. It is always possible to reduce an æsthetic idea to empty formalism, and it is particularly easy to represent dramatic construction in terms of "acts of preparation," "inevitable scenes," and *dénouements*, as though the whole of the playwright's art consisted in working out a mathematical equation from given values. This view was encouraged by Sarcey and other nineteenth-century critics who followed Aristotle at a distance. It was against their machine-made conceptions of drama, as much as against their romantic assumptions, that the modern naturalistic writers rose in revolt.

THE VARIETIES OF DRAMA 61

In the Greek theatre the action of a play was supposed generally to be continuous, and the performance was in fact continuous, the intervals being filled by the commentary and participation of the chorus. The division of plays into various acts and scenes arose from the necessities of a wider and more adventurous field of action, such as was chosen by the Elizabethan poets. The drama in five acts endured for three centuries after the Renaissance as the general model, especially of tragedy. Comedies were often presented in a shorter and less rigid form. The serious modern play of the late nineteenth century took shape usually in four acts. The three-act play is now almost universally in vogue. The leisurely "act of preparation" has been much compressed, the perfunctory last act of explanation and readjustment has been abolished, and the pulse of the action has been quickened accordingly. But these are purely technical conventions, which may be successfully disregarded upon occasion. They are to be distinguished from the laws of rhythmic movement which the drama, born of the spirit of music, imposes upon the theatre.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAMATIST : I

THE origins of dramatic art have been briefly studied in the foregoing chapters. We may now consider the part played by the dramatist in the theatre, which is often held to be the all-important part. It is natural that critics of literature should be preoccupied with the text of dramatic poetry or prose as it survives through the generations. With the playhouse and the actor they have no immediate concern. It is scarcely less natural that modern critics of the stage should accept the dramatist at his own valuation as an autocrat of the theatre whose bidding is performed by subordinates, or as a propagandist whose message is conveyed to the listener by faithful mouthpieces. But if we take the larger view of dramatic art, we must regard the dramatist himself as a collaborator in the dramatic spectacle. He has his own particular history in the theatre.

We must consider him first and foremost as an offspring of the Renaissance.

The great revival of learning that spread throughout Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not only renewed a knowledge of the masterpieces of classical antiquity, but greatly enhanced the dignity of the individual and especially of the artist. To the Renaissance we owe the rise of humanism and the study of the humanities. The new discoveries of the physical world and the invention of printing were outward and visible symbols of an enlargement in the mind of man. Drama, like the other arts, had been withdrawn for centuries into the shadow of the monastic tradition. The spirit of make-believe had found expression in the booths of crowded fairs, where unlettered men, devoutly aware of their own halting steps upon the threshold of eternity, paused to enjoy a religious spectacle enlivened by popular humour. To them came the new pagans, poets and playwrights, as yet perhaps unconscious of their paganism, but deeply stirred by the new revelation of boundless possibilities in human nature, and responsive to the new dignity implied in the thought of human goodness.

A drama within a drama was played upon the stage of the sixteenth century. It was the drama of the dramatist as hero and adventurer, philosopher and explorer, poet and priest.

There were dramatists indeed before the Renaissance, but they were not the dramatists we know. The dramatic poets of antiquity were themselves withdrawn into the shadow of classical tradition by the advent of the moderns. The sublime and impersonal character of their work became alike apparent. It was their own selfless nature, as much as their religious conception of Fate and the gods, that seemed to link them with the spirit of eternal authority. Of all the Greek dramatists there is none (except perhaps Euripides) whom we regard in the first place as an individual writer. The opinions of Æschylus and Sophocles were the received opinions of their time, and their expression, however noble, was as impersonal as that of the forgotten authors of the mediæval mysteries. The judicial grandeur of the ancients, born of a calm foreknowledge of popular assent, was never possible to the adventurous spirits of the Renaissance, whose audience still trailed one lingering foot in the

Dark Ages. Moreover, the Renaissance poets were themselves more or less conscious rebels against eternal authority. Pascal and Aristotle had too much in common for their liking. If they admired the classical models, and sought expression through classical forms, it was not from any kinship or even sympathy with the inward calm of the Hellenic nature. Life was too turbulent for that. New worlds awaited discovery, new fields of the spirit lay still untrodden. The firm ground of dogma was exchanged for the uncharted seas. For good or ill, these men of the Renaissance were loyal sons of their age. They manfully faced their responsibilities, not the least of which was a responsibility to themselves.

Thus there entered into drama that new element of personal experience which is an essential part of the modern spirit, and together with it an element of personal authority that was henceforward to be linked with the character of the dramatist. Not that the Elizabethan playwrights (to take a familiar example) as yet considered themselves in the modern light as artists, or philosophers, or prophets. They were content to be good writers and craftsmen of the theatre. Per-

haps some of the humility of the Middle Ages still clung about their minds, for they were content to write verses, and made little ado about being poets, although among them were some of the greatest poets of all time. The conventional talk about art was brought by travelled men from Italy, where the Renaissance was more showy and pleasure-loving than in Northern lands. The strength of the new dramatic movement lay in the unmistakable element of personal character. Continually we catch echoes of the doubts and fears and hopes that fill the spirit of man in his quest, not of the gods indeed, or of the riddle of the Sphinx, but of himself. In a new sense we share the perilous adventures of his journey, as the dramatist unfolds the psychological drama of the Prince of Denmark or the tragic destiny of King Lear. These are no longer royal figures raised upon a stage above their fellow-men, but creations of our common nature.

The later growth in the authority of the dramatist, extending over centuries, was fostered by many diverse elements. Chief among them was the rise of individual judgment, and that is why we may reasonably

trace the spiritual parentage of the present-day dramatist to the Renaissance. But within the theatre itself other influences were at work. The dramatic form grew gradually more precise. The progressive withdrawal of the stage from the auditorium, which we have already noted, gave to the play the character of something definitely imagined by the author and set before the spectator at a certain distance, like a self-complete picture. Another factor was the readiness of playwrights to seize the stage as the natural platform of popular expression in changing times. Thus Beaumarchais' *Marriage of Figaro* was one of the historical documents of the French Revolution, and Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, nearly a century later, became a rallying-cry for the early advocates of female emancipation. The dramatists took the lead in bold adventure, as was their right; but their partners in the theatre were slow to follow them, and lacked the taste or energy to assert their own true place in dramatic art. Thus the dramatist became more and more the arbiter and ruler of the playhouse, not by reason of any increasing poetic merit in his work, but through the force of circumstance and the

domination of individual will. To this day few dramatists are animated by the vision of a whole art of the theatre, to which as poet-craftsmen they shall contribute their part.

Since Italy was the home of the Renaissance and the ground of classical tradition, it may be convenient to begin our brief survey with some mention of Italian drama. The love of the Italians for the theatre kept various forms of drama alive throughout the Middle Ages; but owing, perhaps, to the lack of national patriotism and the stress of political circumstances, the revival of learning brought with it no such wave of dramatic expression as in other countries. Native tragedies began to appear in the earliest years of the sixteenth century. They were followed by comedies of much greater merit, notably those of **ARIOSTO** (1474–1533), who has been called the father of modern comedy, though he is more celebrated as the author of the poem *Orlando Furioso*. **Machiavelli** (1469–1527) has left at least one satirical comedy, called *Mandragola*. In the same century arose the school of pastoral comedy, which was really a dramatic version of the bucolic idyll, accompanied by music, and may be considered as the forerunner of

modern opera. The comedies of this period were for the most part very coarse, and the poets like Tasso (1544-1595) who tried their hand at tragedy failed to make a deep impression on the stage. The Italian theatre had fallen into decay when its spirit was revived by CARLO GOLDONI (1707-1793), one of the great masters of comedy and a most prolific writer, whose 150 comedies are remarkable for their varied themes and their faithful study of manners. A reaction against the comparative realism of Goldoni appears in the work of the Venetian CARLO GOZZI (1722-1806), who sought to restore some of the formalism of the older comedy. His themes were chosen from Neapolitan or Oriental legend, and were often treated satirically. The outstanding name in Italian tragedy is that of ALFIERI (1749-1803), the lover of the Duchess of Albany and the writer of a number of impassioned dramas, both classical and historical in subject. During the greater part of the nineteenth century the Italian theatre was barren, but the general revival in Europe was marked by the appearance of the rather highly-coloured dramas of Gabriele d'Annunzio. In still more recent times LUIGI

PIRANDELLO, the writer of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, has aroused lively interest by giving a metaphysical turn to drama. His work is no doubt influenced by the theory of relativity, which he presents in a truly , dramatic and provocative shape.

The Spanish theatre of the Renaissance was much less influenced by the classical models than that of France or Italy, and it showed a vigorous though shortlived independence, as well as an admirable command of form. The comedy of intrigue is largely of Spanish invention, and the legend of Don Juan forms one of the most fertile dramatic motives of the European stage. For these reasons the Spanish playwrights were widely imitated in other countries, and many of the earliest romantic dramas show their inspiration. In Spain, as in England, the awakening of the theatre came at the hour of heightened national patriotism and of the adventurous conquest of the New World. Cervantes is generally held to have failed in the dramatic form, owing to the episodical character of his writing; but his younger contemporary LOPE DE VEGA (1562-1635) was an extremely ingenious and versatile playwright and a master of easy

musical verse. He wrote more than a thousand plays, the most characteristic of which are the "cloak and sword" comedies from which Molière and others borrowed freely. A greater dramatist, though less universal in his appeal, was CALDERON (1600-1681), in whom the national spirit of Spain came to flower. His style has always been admired, but the general European world cannot readily appreciate his religious fidelity to the Castilian thought and manners of his age. Some later Spanish writers approached more nearly to the French and English comedy of character, but the stage fell into decadence in the eighteenth century. In our own day the Spanish drama is represented by the formal pieces of José Echegaray and the comedies of Benavente and Sierra, some of which have been translated into other languages.

Throughout the Middle Ages France had been the chief home of the miracle plays, and it is not surprising that the Renaissance should have brought a great dramatic revival to the group of provinces clustered around Paris and the Ile-de-France. There had even been signs of an original drama, neither classical nor religious, as early as the thirteenth century.

The troubadours, notably Adam de la Halle, may be said to have invented the earliest form of comic opera. But for many decades after the revival of learning in other countries, French drama was destined to follow the trend of Italian and Spanish influences. One of the group of writers called the Pléiade, headed by the poet Ronsard, was Jodelle (1582-1572), who is considered as the parent of French classical tragedy. His *Cléopâtre Captive* is an imitation of Seneca, retaining even the tragic chorus of the ancient model. Robert Garnier (1545-1601) developed the same form, in which the chorus gradually dropped out of use; but the only true noteworthy achievement of these writers was the introduction of the Alexandrine verse, or twelve-syllabled rhyming couplet, which became the acknowledged medium of dramatic as of other poetry. Meanwhile comedy in France was almost entirely borrowed from Italy or Spain. Pierre de Larivey (1550-1612) was a forerunner of Molière, and Rotrou (1609-1650) of Corneille; Alexandre Hardy (1570-1631) was a prolific writer of melodrama; but it was not until the time of Malherbe that a truly national drama began to form itself under the inspiration

of the classics without following them slavishly.

The modern French drama came into being with CORNEILLE (1606-1684), whose masterpiece *Le Cid* has ranked ever since its production as one of the classics of the stage. Corneille was a great rhetorician, a master of the dramatic tirade which gives splendid opportunities to the actor. His dramas, infused with intellectual passion, sing the tragical triumphs of will and courage over the blind malignity of Fate. But the characters, for all their grandeur, remain largely abstractions of the mind, and it is plain that the poet was cramped by the formal theories of his time, which were opposed to his own naturally romantic genius. It was in the great age of Louis XIV that the drama, with the other arts, came to its noblest expression. It was never popular in the sense that the Elizabethan drama was popular in England; but its formalism was imposed from within and not from without, by the will of writers who were proudly conscious of their own part in the bright pageantry of aristocracy and manners. Moreover, it was a drama not only of the study or even of the narrower stage, but

of the theatre in the widest sense, including the theatre of lamplit gardens and brilliant masquerades, of ballets and impromptus, of witty trifles improvised for the entertainment of radiant assemblages of courtiers; and if the playwrights lived in this circle of elegance by royal favour, they nevertheless preserved the nature of true artists independent alike of the fashionable world for whose pleasure they worked, and of the academic world that would have sought to fetter their expression.

Molière was the elder of the two great dramatists of this serene age, but it was in the genius of RACINE (1639–1699) that serenity found tragic expression. Racine is gentler and upon the whole more human than Corneille. If he is often thought to be dull and conventional, we may seek the reason in the simplicity of his method. His logic is a little chilling to the English spirit. He was the natural parent of the well-made play—the drama of swift and inevitable crises swiftly and inevitably resolved. But he was muchst more than this. He was a master of the sovereign harmonies of the theatre—not only of the dramatic tirade, but of the interplay of passion arising from purely natural impulses

of human nature. Such was his precision that all his plays can be acted at the present day just as they were written, and most of them are so acted on the French classical stage, where they mean neither more nor less than they meant to the audience of Racine's own time, but exactly realize the author's purpose. The tragedy of *Phèdre* offers the supreme acting part of the French theatre. Further, Racine was a poet of great subtlety, who used the limited resources of his instrument with sure taste, and was often more eloquent in his brief and natural interjections than other dramatists in their most impassioned harangues. His conscious and continual aim was flawless execution, and it was fulfilled with a completeness very rare in the history of literature and still rarer in the history of the stage.

MOLIERE (1622-1673) is not only the most famous of all French writers, but the supreme genius of comedy. His art is purely national, but his appeal universal. He spent his lifetime in the theatre, and was actor and manager as well as dramatist. For years he toured the French provinces as a strolling player. When at length he came to court to enjoy the favour

of Louis at Versailles, he was already a man of forty and his masterpieces were as yet unwritten. He died in harness at the age of fifty-one, having composed in the space of eleven years (1662-1673) the most celebrated of his thirty-four plays. Until his day the lighter stage of the French theatre had been filled with hack adaptations or imitations of the Spanish and Italian models. Molière himself was a good borrower from such sources when occasion offered; but his discovery of the rich dramatic field of daily life raised him suddenly above his contemporaries, while it also gave a new and permanent dignity to the comic art. Henceforward the writers of comedy in all countries had a true model before them in his finished work, which they could hope to equal but not to surpass. They had likewise a mine of lively invention, in which they delved with advantage. The English playwrights of the Restoration borrowed widely from Molière, though they were seldom forward in acknowledgment.

It has been said that all the good comic plots of the world are to be found in the plays of Molière; but that is because they exhibit all the good comic characters, from whose

nature the action naturally springs. Fops and high-flown ladies, pedants and blue-stockings, misers and hypocrites, snobs and egoists, dupes and quacks and cuckolds flourish on this stage. In the lighter pieces, at any rate, there is no attempt at the study of complex character. The two or three lines of the sketch are exactly drawn. We guess what situations will arise from the presence of these types on the stage, and we perhaps foresee what they will do in each situation. This foreknowledge is a part of the spectator's pleasure. When a dramatist says "I told you so" to his audience as plainly as Molière says it in *Georges Dandin*, or the *Discomfited Husband*, shall the listener not enjoy the satisfaction of nudging his neighbour with a like remark? Indeed, in a sense it is the expected that should always happen in a theatre. An unexpected happening makes an undramatic effect, like the accidental overturning of a piece of stage furniture. It is the manner of the happening—the art of preparation—that counts. And with Molière the art of preparation is rooted in a true observation of humanity.

Many of his shorter plays are outright

farces, and in them we recognize not only stock characters, but some of the conventional figures of old Italian comedy, with conventional names. Several of the more serious pieces, like *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *L'Avaro*, or *Don Juan*, are composed in prose; others, like *Le Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe*, or *Les Femmes Savantes*, in the familiar rhyming couplets. Ballets and choruses were often introduced into the action. There is none of the irregular, alternative use of verse and prose that we find in the Elizabethan drama. Molière is sometimes reproached with the fault that his verse is too much like prose, and his prose too much like verse. The choice between them seems to have been made at the whim of the dramatist rather than at the dictation of his subject. It is interesting to note that Molière wrote dialogue in verse for what we should call his serious drawing-room comedies. To the cultivated audience of Paris or Versailles this usage appeared perfectly natural, and it remains as natural to this day. It is true that the sonority of the French language, with its constant recurrence of mute e's to divide the verses, and its easy rhymes, lends itself peculiarly to the formal style in dramatic

dialogue. But in such matters there is no law except that of rhythm, which is ageless. Had Oscar Wilde's comedies been composed in iambic pentameters, their artificial character would have been neither heightened nor diminished. There is no reason (beyond a prudent fear of the theatrical manager's prejudice) why our own modern comedies should not be written in verse instead of prose. Indeed, the discipline of verse would be excellent for the playwright, relieving him of a great burden of slang and interjection; and it would serve as a useful check upon the actor who wanders at will from his words.

This is no place for a detailed study of Molière's plays, but in surveying his marvellous gallery of portraits every spectator must pause before the studies of Monsieur Jourdain, the Bourgeois Gentilhomme, most lovable and amusing of social upstarts; of Tartuffe, hypocrite, lecher, and statesman; and of Alceste, misanthrope, dreamer, and self-tormenter. In the heroines there likewise appears the full radiance of womanly character illumined by spirited independence. Throughout the Dark Ages women had held their own with men in wit and cultivation, as in courage

and piety. The lady abbesses had entertained princes at their table; the noble embroidresses in castle halls had ruled provinces and disposed of peace and war. But here at length woman walks the stage of daily life, not as queen or plaything or ideal, but as equal and companion.

Molière's plays, like Racine's, have come down to us intact and inviolable. They are best seen on such a stage as that of the Comédie Française, where no stick of needless furniture impedes the action. The group of characters is composed. They rarely sit, unless sitting be actually an inevitable gesture, but stand well in the foreground of the stage, with nothing but traditional tone and gesture to help them, and deliberately set about the business of acting. Thus every word is given its just proportion, every silence (and the silences of Molière are most memorable) its calm significance. In regarding such an art of the theatre we understand what is meant by the actor's creation of a part, and we remember gratefully that Molière was himself a player, who impressed the stamp of dignity upon an enduring tradition.

The name of MARIVAUX (1688-1768) added

a new word to the French language in "marivaudage," the refinement of thought and expression that characterizes his comedies. He was something more than a precious writer, though his plots and personages alike have a Watteau-like quality and seem to shimmer in some world of derivative fancy. He touches reality in the mind of his own creations, especially in the characters of the artificial and delightful *Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*. It was inevitable that the restless spirit of Voltaire should be ambitious to shine in drama, and no doubt he believed for a time that his tragedies had made a permanent mark on the French stage; but they are now forgotten. Indeed, throughout the great critical age of the eighteenth century the French theatre produced little work of importance. It was only when the critical ferment had worked, and the time for action drew near, that the drama came into its own again.

The production in 1784 of *Le Mariage de Figaro* by BEAUMARCHAIS owed some of its dramatic importance to the changing time. "Small substance in that *Figaro*," exclaims Carlyle; "thin wire-drawn intrigues, thin wire-drawn sentiments and sarcasms; a thing

lean, barren, yet which winds and whisks itself, as through a wholly mad universe, adroitly, with a high sniffing air; wherein each, as was hinted, which was the grand secret, may see some image of himself, and of his own state and ways. So it runs its hundred nights, and all France runs with it, laughing applause." Thence it is but a step (though a long one) to the dramatists of the romantic movement with VICTOR HUGO (1800-1885) and ALEXANDRE DUMAS THE ELDER (1808-1870) at their head. Both were great novelists and both brought to the stage tremendous rhetorical powers, but in the light of a century's experience it appears that their plays, although impassioned and effective, were very much akin to melodrama. Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) was a writer of much less distinction but of even greater facility, and Victorien Sardou, author of *Madame Sans-Gêne*, held the stage for nearly half a century with his dexterous pieces, which served as foundation for many English and German adaptations. The plays of DUMAS THE YOUNGER (1824-1895) likewise have had a long and popular career, thanks to their smooth construction and moralizing man-of-the-world philosophy. To them may

be traced the inspiration of the thesis play, called the "problem play" in its English form. *La Dame aux Camélias* is the most celebrated of Dumas' plays, and in the part of the heroine the greatest of modern actresses have triumphed. In this middle period of the nineteenth century the French stage exercised the supreme influence in the world-theatre, and the lessons of its technique were not lost upon the more important dramatists who were beginning to appear in Middle and Northern Europe.

In France itself, before the advent of the naturalistic moderns, there was one harbinger of a fresh and original drama. This was HENRY BECQUE (1837-1899), author of *Les Corbeaux*, a penetrating study of middle-class life, and of the brilliant and ironical *La Parisienne*, which is still regularly played on the French classical stage. Becque, however, had none of the vitality that belongs to the leader of a movement. It was the foundation of the Théâtre Libre by M. Antoine in 1887 that gave the needful impulse to the writers of the younger school. Ibsen's work was here introduced to France, and the theatre attracted a group of more or less naturalistic playwrights,

some of whom, like Georges Courteline and Eugène Brieux, continued to flourish on the regular stage. Edmond Rostand's heroic comedy of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897) stands in a place apart from this movement by reason of its romantic spirit and strong sense of the theatre. Maurice Maeterlinck brought some fresher inspiration from his native country of Belgium. His earlier plays, such as *Pelléas and Mélisande*, are remarkable for their poetic treatment of legendary themes, and in *Monna Vanna* he endeavoured to give new ethical values to traditional dramatic motives; but as a dramatist he has never shown sustained power. His opposition to the prevailing realistic tendencies of the theatre is reflected in the work of other writers. Paul Claudel, author of *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, is the most distinguished of these symbolists. Jules Romains, H. R. Lenormand and Denys Amiel are among the more original writers for the stage in recent years. The comedies of Sacha Guitry are adroit and gay. Jean Cocteau and Jean Giraudoux have brought elements of original fantasy into the theatre, and the latter especially must be reckoned among the newer hopes.

Perhaps the greatest service rendered to the theatre by the Latin countries, from the Renaissance to the present day, has been the maintenance of the tradition of form. There are few innovators among the dramatists at whose work we have briefly glanced. Some of them are craftsmen hampered by the limitations of the classical model, which nevertheless they gladly accepted and made their own. All, in their various ways, are aware of the eternal theatre and of the ancient culture from which it sprang. It is true that French formalism went so far that Voltaire was unable to appreciate the genius of Shakespeare; it is true that every original spirit among the later Latins must grapple with the conventions of the tradition to which he himself belongs. But the drama is rooted in the soil of these lands where the Renaissance came to flower. The names of Goldoni, Molière or Calderon are pledges of fidelity to the cause of theatrical art, just as they are echoes of a world of limpid thought and lively fancy. While the theatre endures, the forms they upheld will not easily be overthrown.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAMATIST : II

It is now time to consider the great treasure-house of English drama, which was less consciously derived from the Renaissance than the drama of the Latin countries, but nevertheless achieved a still nobler expression. While Ariosto still lived, and Lope de Vega was in the cradle, came the earliest dramas of Elizabethan character, bearing such robust titles as *Ralph Roister-Doister* (Nicholas Udall) and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (John Still), and competing with the moralities and later mysteries for popular favour. There were some early attempts (as in France) at tragedy in the Senecan manner, and some echoes of Italian comedy, before the time of Kyd, Peele, Greene, and Marlowe, who truly popularized original drama for the first time. John Lyly, celebrated as the author of the vogue of "Euphuism," was another writer for the stage. Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* dates

THE DRAMATIST.

87

from about 1565, but it was the *Tragedy of the Great of Christopher Marlowe* (1593) that marked the beginning of a new epoch. Marlowe's play, with few exceptions, is held to have been the first to spare many hint for the Merchant of Venice. His *Doctor Faustus* was an immediately successful version of the legend "with its devil and such-like trivial point." His *Edward II*, notable for the character of Pierre Gaveston, is the great forerunner of the Shakespearean historical play. The instrument of blank verse, which until Marlowe's time had been crude and clumsy, was much enriched by the epic and dramatic. Marlowe is said by some to have been a free-thinker. His early and violent death in a Deptford tavern robbed the theatre and literature of a noble spirit who might have stood beside the greatest.

With Marlowe's contemporaries, as with himself, scholars have had much trouble, owing to the confusion of authorship. Greene, Peele, Kyd, Drayton, and Thomas Lodge are all more or less entangled, and some of them at least had a hand in plays that were later assigned to Shakespeare. Richard Burbage,

who was in their manager and Shakespeare's part is the key to this riddle of group problem. We may well believe that the public not at first particularly interested in author's name, and that many of its plays, the work of these men of the theatre, lay in the manager's drawer to be used when occasion offered.

SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) is thought to have come to London from Stratford about 1588, and to have become an actor in the Earl of Leicester's company, playing in Shoreditch. The company was at least once reconstructed, and it bore the name of the Lord Chamberlain's company when Shakespeare was associated with the management. He may have been occupied for years in reshaping the plays of the group that came before him; certainly most of his plays produced before 1595 contained passages by other authors. His first play is supposed to be *Love's Labour's Lost*, and his last *King Henry VIII* (most of which, however, is assigned to Fletcher). He began writing between 1589 and 1592, and ended not later than 1611 or 1612. The great masterpieces

of *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* were composed between 1601 and 1606, when the poet was near forty. The sequence of the *Historie* was interrupted by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, and soon later by *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. From a joyous period (1599-1606) date the comedies of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As you like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night*. The *Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are late works. Before his death Shakespeare enjoyed a few years of retirement as a country gentleman of Stratford.

This is properly all that need be said of him in the present book, for the main purpose is to fix his place in the dramatic sequence. Yet since the whole art of the theatre is our province, it may be allowable to say something of the degree in which Shakespeare transcends the stage. If his plays are performed more seldom than they should be, and faults are common in the performance, we should not wholly blame the taste of our own day, or the taste of actors and producers. The genius of Shakespeare, unlike that of Sophocles, unlike that of Molière, did unquestionably overflow

the vessel of his craft. The purists who would perform every Shakespearean play word for word as it was written do not begin to understand this sublime transgression. Theatre, and not only drama, was the goal of Shakespeare. Theatre, and not only drama, is the goal of Shakespearean performance. When theatre and drama are not wholly fused, as they are in the work of a Racine, but both alike are thrown upward by the convulsions of unconquerable genius, of what avail is it to insist upon the dogmas of a printed text? Of what avail to represent *Lear*, or even *Hamlet*, as they were written or are supposed to have been written? To the producer, Shakespeare is a problem and must remain a problem. There are solutions, and there will be solutions throughout all time; but they are the solutions of the artist, not of the scholar. Shakespeare the actor and manager was doubtless aware of the problem offered by Shakespeare the playwright. If Shakespeare the poet writes :

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme,

his problem of performance lives also—a problem of the deepest significance and

fascination to his fellow-craft men of the theatre.

Shakespeare now appears completely to dominate the Elizabethan stage, but group protection and influence endured throughout his career, and for some time after his death. Of his younger contemporaries, the most famous is Ben Jonson (1573-1637), who turned his scholarly hand to the writing of lifelike classical tragedies, but was more successful in portraying the "humour" of the body corporate in his comedies, such as *Every Man in his Humour* and *Bartholomew Fair*. Jonson was a theorist opposed to many of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, but he was also a warm friend and admirer, and he has left a eulogy of the poet prefixed to the Folio of 1623. Other writers for the stage at this time were Marston, Middleton, Chapman, Heywood, and Dekker, of whom the last-named especially is remembered for *The Witch of Edmonton*. In the reign of James I. came what is regarded as the decadence of drama, with some noble works like John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and a profusion of plays by Rowley, Ford, Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, marred by a general

grossness of taste and expression. It was in this period, very naturally, that rising Puritanism appeared as the avowed enemy of the playhouse. The temper of the age was clouded; the splendid era of adventure and discovery was past. The dramatist as poet was in full decline. He was to reappear as playwright, wit and man of the world, with some tinge of classical scholarship, at the reopening of the theatre after the Civil War and the Commonwealth.

The English drama loosely called "Restoration Comedy" enjoys a notoriety quite out of proportion to its true place in the history of the theatre. By way of correction it has been undervalued by the literary historians, some of whom would almost ignore the plays of Wycherley, Congreve, Etherege, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, and even the dramatic works of Dryden. The Restoration theatre was in many respects flat and tawdry. The atmosphere of poetic creation was almost entirely lacking. If Charles Lamb held the characters of this stage to be "a world of themselves almost as much as fairyland," he had no thought of wonder or mystery, but was paradoxically defending these figures of idle

gallantry from the shafts of nineteenth-century moralism. The profligate, within their own proper sphere of artificial being, did not offend his taste; nor need they offend ours. As long as they remain viewed in the hard light of pure comedy they are most entertaining puppets. They will scarcely endure a gleam of sentiment, and the ray of fusion of sentimentality is positively fatal to the picture.

The Restoration playwright at least maintained the great tradition of form in the spoken word. There indeed was almost a theatre of words, and their self-conscious insistence on the virtue of wit becomes tiresome to our ears. WILLIAM WYCHERLEY (1640-1715) had other qualities to recommend him, for he was nicknamed "manly Wycherley" after the character of the hero in his *Plain Dealer*, and although he inherited the coarseness of the decadent Elizabethans and Jacobians, his *Country Wife* is a true masterpiece of our comedy of manners. WILLIAM CONGREVE (1672-1729), like Wycherley, turned to the theatre in the casual fashion of the day, and wrote his half-dozen plays before retiring to a life of gouty leisure. His affectation of preferring to be considered a private gentleman

rather than a writer is known to have exasperated Voltaire, who paid him a visit of homage. Congreve is the master of spirited prose dialogue. His characters are as easy and graceful as his writing, and Millamant in *The Way of the World* is a delightful heroine comparable with any in Molière. *Love for Love* is brilliantly sustained, and *The Old Bachelor* won Dryden's praise. Vanbrugh is remembered for *The Provok'd Wife*, and Farquhar for *The Beaumont's Stratagem*, both of which are sometimes revived to this day; but it is needless to dwell on a form of drama that shows all the marks of sameness. The decline of Restoration comedy was hastened by the attacks of Jeremy Collier on the immorality of the stage, to which Congreve made a feeble defence. Meanwhile John Dryden had written both classical tragedies and lyrical comedies without adding greatly to his reputation as a poet. Lee and Otway belong to his tradition. The plays of Fielding are remembered chiefly because their attempt to expose Parliamentary corruption led to the institution of the English dramatic censorship.

The production of Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* marked a revival of comedy, but it

was comedy of a sentimental kind, much less brilliant than that of the Restoration period. The popularity of SHERIDAN (1751-1816) endures, and his work must be considered the true link between the older artificial comedy and the nineteenth-century drama. In style or wit Sheridan cannot compare with Congreve, but his craft is skilful, his characters are often lovable, and he makes himself readily understood. *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* have been preserved by the excellence of their acting parts as much as by their adroitness in plot and situation. With all his faults, Sheridan was a man of letters. For more than a century after the production of his plays, no man of letters made an appearance as dramatist on the English stage.

In the nineteenth century the English theatre was almost untouched by the romantic movement, but such works as *Richelieu* (1889) by Lord Lytton gained great popularity for a while. Shelley's *The Cenci* was a solitary cry almost unheard in the dramatic wilderness. A generation later came Robertson, whose *Caste* (1867) gave more than a hint of the direction the modern drama was to follow. Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is

generally considered to be another landmark of the modern English stage, but it was written after the influence of Ibsen had begun to be felt. In high comedy *The Liars* of Henry Arthur Jones was deservedly successful. The plays of Oscar Wilde, notably the brilliant farce *The Importance of Being Earnest*, set a fashion of epigrammatic style, and as far as verbal form is concerned they will bear comparison with the comedies of Congreve. The subject-matter, however, is often commonplace and sometimes sentimental.

A more vigorous impulse was given by the plays of BERNARD SHAW, whose *Widowers' Houses* was first produced by the London Independent Theatre in 1892. Bernard Shaw thus entered the English theatre at the time when the controversy about the work of Ibsen was at its height. He was himself an active controversialist, and his original purpose was to write dramatic pamphlets in support of the Ibsenite (or supposedly revolutionary) cause. Thus his first play is an exposure of the evils of slum landlordism, somewhat in the vein of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*. Revolutionaries, like reactionaries, may be more royalist than the king. Bernard

Shaw was more Ibsenite than Ibsen. He has enriched the theatre by a long succession of plays whose positive quality (apart from their abounding and irrepressible wit) lies in the passion of moral, political and social indignation with which they are infused. He has stripped militarism of its glamour, history of its pomp, sex of its romance, science of its magic, and religion of its sorcery. Yet he seeks to create as well as to destroy. Without a trace of respect for æsthetic standards—which are indeed included in his formidable list of common heresies—he has contrived to stimulate the thought and quicken the perception of multitudes, and to present his own lucid philosophy in a form that fits the necessity of the stage.

The contemporaries of 'such a man are fortunate. The London Court Theatre, where in 1904–1907 a number of Bernard Shaw's plays were produced for the first time, became the stage of other original dramatists, among them St John Hankin, John Galsworthy, John Masefield and Harley Granville-Barker. Repertory theatres began to be founded in the English provinces, and to these we owe the plays of Stanley Houghton, Allan Monkhouse

and others. In the writing of comedy Somerset Maugham has maintained a consistently high level, and Barrie's individual blend of fancy and sentiment appeals to vast audiences. The post-war generation has been marked especially by phenomenal successes among individual plays, notably *Journey's End* (R. C. Sherriff), *Cavalcade* and others (Noel Coward), *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (Rudolf Besier), *The Apple Cart* (Shaw), *Richard of Bordeaux* (Gordon Daviot), and *The First Mrs. Fraser* (St. John Ervine). Poets like T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden appear also among dramatists.

The revival of the Irish theatre has produced one remarkable work, Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, which stands apart from the general mass of present-day drama by its natural kinship with literature. A passionate sincerity in the study of everyday life gives distinction to the plays of Sean O'Casey.

In Germany, where the Renaissance proper was overshadowed by the spirit of the Reformation, there was no literary drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at all comparable with that of the other countries at which we have glanced. The *Fastnachtsspiele*, or Shrovetide plays, which had originated

with the mediæval Church, were turned to the purposes of the Reformation. The early humanists made essays in the dramatic form, and the scholars who had studied the Latin models gave the native drama some classical technique. Hans Sachs (1494–1576), the cobbler of Nuremberg, was not only a “master singer” and narrative poet but a prolific writer of tragedies and comedies; yet there was no true theatre to serve as school and medium for his work or that of his contemporaries. The impulse came from England, through the companies of actors who visited Germany bringing with them versions of Elizabethan drama. These were widely imitated by native playwrights before the Thirty Years’ War put a temporary end to dramatic development. The influence of the Renaissance was spread, however, by the printing of ballads and chap-books of popular legends, among them that of Doctor Faustus, and these were destined to serve as a foundation of the later drama.

In the neo-classical period of the eighteenth century Gottsched sought to reform the theatre of middle Germany “according to the rules of the ancient Greeks and Romans,”

or otherwise to introduce the French taste. Other writers were influenced by the post-Shakespearean English drama, but it was not until the great age of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller that German drama became a truly national force. The German dramatists of this period were the late and final flower of the Renaissance in Europe, and their interpretation of the passionate human spirit, rather than their sense of form, gives them a special place in world literature. A living ethical element was brought into the study of the classics—an element absent from the pseudo-classical work of France—and eventually Weimar, as the home of the new school of poets, became a symbol of the spiritual significance of awakened mankind. All this was accomplished without the aid either of the vague cosmopolitanism of the time, or of the conscious nationalism that had appeared in other countries. Germany was still a loose aggregation of provinces and a nation without a capital. Nationalism grew up with the poets, rather than the poets with nationalism. When Germany of the present day seeks to frame a constitution for her Republic, it is to Weimar that she naturally

THE DRAMATIST :

turns as meeting-place. If we think of an English national assembly convoked at Stratford-on-Avon, we shall have the nearest imaginary parallel.

LESSING (1729-1821) was a critic as well as a great dramatist, and he was the first of the classical critics to accept the moderns like Shakespeare at their true worth. By initiating the form of "domestic tragedy" he became the parent of the modern German drama. *Minna von Barnhelm* is a comedy that has held the stage by its own excellence and its reflection of the age of Frederick the Great. *Nathan the Wise* is a noble plea for religious tolerance, expressed in a considered poetic form which the dramatist sought to substitute for the artificial form of French tragedy. Since there was much of the lawgiver in his nature, Lessing was naturally looked upon by his younger contemporaries as a conservative force in German drama, and during the "storm and stress" period, named from the eager search of the poets for new humanistic values, they rebelled against his teachings. The lyrical element of the German spirit especially was seeking expression.

Of all the great dram

(1749–1832) is perhaps the farthest removed from the theatre proper. He was a scholar, a scientist, a metaphysician, even a statesman. He was the representative man of his time, as he is the representative poet of Germany. The stage was but one of the preoccupations of his restless and inexhaustible genius. He began by writing historical character plays in the Shakespearean vein, passed to the more formal tragedy of *Egmont*, and then, under the stimulus of his visit to Italy (1786–1787), composed the two classical dramas *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Torquato Tasso*. The first part of the monumental tragedy of *Faust* appeared in 1808, and the second part occupied him at intervals for the remainder of his life. With Goethe the legend of Doctor Faustus became a tragedy of the universal destiny of mankind, in which the personal characters were intended to represent the forces at work in the soul. Some of these figures are enlarged in human stature, while others are magnified into giant abstractions. Part I of the tragedy is a difficult and unwieldy stage play, infused with a sublime lyrical power; Part II is a vast speculative allegory with but little relation to the stage. It is only by violence that

Goethe's dramatic writing can thus be briefly disentangled from his work as a whole. No greater mind has ever touched the drama.

SCHILLER (1759–1805), his contemporary and friend, had a finer instinct for the theatre, and it was he who first gave a truly dramatic direction to the movement of "storm and stress." His first play *Die Räuber* (The Brigands) made him famous. *Don Carlos* (1787) showed him to be already turning, like Goethe, to a more classical form of expression. After some years of retirement from the theatre, during which he was influenced by the philosophy of Kant, he produced the trilogy of *Wallenstein* with its background of the Thirty Years' War, and the two dramas of English and French History, *Maria Stuart* and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. Personal idealism is the grand motive of these chronicle plays, which are classics of the German stage. Schiller's last play, *Wilhelm Tell*, is the national epic of German Switzerland, to which the dramatist, as a Southerner, felt himself closely akin. If Goethe was the supreme intellectual genius of this period, Schiller was an equal æsthetic power, and the happy reactions of

Frühlings Erwachen (1905). He may be considered the originator of German "expressionism," a form of art in which Georg Kaiser and other ultra-moderns have made experiments. They are most successful, however, when the new form is touched with some poetic significance, as in Ernst Toller's *Masse-Mensch* (Masses and Men). The National-Socialist revolution swept from the stage practically all the work that had gone immediately before it; and the tendencies of the new German drama are still far from clear.

The Austrian stage of our day has produced no very original works, but Arthur Schnitzler, the author of *Anatol* and *Liebelein*, possessed all the grace of the later dramatists of the Latin countries with more ironical power. His plays give an admirable impression of the cultivated society of Vienna as it existed before the European war. Great hopes were at one time aroused by the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, a poet and dramatist inspired by the Italian Renaissance. His early one-act plays are full of lyrical beauty, but in *Elektra* and *Oedipus und die Sphinx* he added little beyond artifice to the themes of Greek tragedy. From Czecho-Slovakia, since it

ceased to be a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, have come the interesting and provocative plays of Karel Capek, of which *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots) has been widely performed. Hungary likewise has been a prolific source of drama in recent times.

The Scandinavian drama may reasonably be considered to begin with Ibsen, although his contemporary Bjornsterne Bjornson anticipated him with one or two historical and saga plays, and likewise turned to the composition of social dramas before 1870. Bjornson's plays have never made any deep impression on the European stage. The best of them is *Beyond Human Power*, a modern piece with a thread of supernatural interest.

HENRIK IBSEN (1828-1906), the great Norwegian who more than any other writer has influenced the stage of our times, was for some time engaged in the theatres of Bergen and Christiania, either as manager or adviser. He retired to the study towards the age of thirty-five, and afterwards composed all his more important plays, including *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* as well as the long series of social dramas. From 1864 to 1891 he lived chiefly in Italy and Germany. In such a separation

of the dramatist from his native theatre we have a symbol of Ibsen's resolute individualism. He was indeed among the greatest of theatrical craftsmen, but his inspiration and his craft alike were of the study. His plays, slowly and even laboriously written, appeared at intervals of two or three years throughout his creative period. To their author, as to the public, they represented completely finished works, awaiting a definite reproduction at the hands of the theatre. In Ibsen the playwright's authority is already absolute.

The dramatic poems of *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* were much less deliberately designed for the stage than the succeeding dramas. The former sings the failures and triumphs of indomitable idealism; in the latter the weakness of national character is satirized with abundant fancy. *A Doll's House* (1879) is the dramatic document of woman's emancipation. *Ghosts* (1881) was for some decades the favourite play of the advanced theatre, partly because it was so stupidly abused by the reactionaries in every country. In *The Wild Duck*, perhaps the greatest of the prose dramas, appears the element of symbolism that is developed in

the later plays. *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* are models of construction, and the part of Hedda offers the actress as great an opportunity as any to be found in Dumas or Sudermann. *The Master Builder* is generally held to mark the beginning of Ibsen's third period, in which the action of the drama is withdrawn to a less naturalistic plane, and symbols are used with ever greater freedom. In general, the translators of Ibsen have succeeded admirably with the plays of his middle period, where his social message is directly set forth. Perhaps they had not wholly conveyed the spirit of mystery that broods over his earliest and latest works. Moreover Ibsen suffered at the hands of the Ibsenites, who were content with the platitudinous home truths of *An Enemy of the People* or *The Pillars of Society*, and represented their author as a playwright whose sole aim was the "unmasking" of social shams. He was in truth an individual poet without overwhelming intellectual gifts, who solved no riddles but dramatized the problems of his own age and ours.

Meanwhile in Sweden AUGUST STRINDBERG (1849-1912) exerted a quite independent

influence upon European drama. His modern plays are strongly coloured by prejudice. Himself one of the unhappiest of men, he scorned Ibsen's feminism and set himself, not without bitterness, to prove the superiority of the male in an intellectual war of the sexes. Thus in *The Father* a woman steadily drives her husband to insanity by making him doubt that he is the father of her child, and in *Creditors* a weakling physically and morally ruined by his wife is lashed with ridicule by her former possessor. At the same time Strindberg was an intellectual aristocrat, a vigorous pioneer of the naturalistic drama, and (in his later years) something of a mystic. His historical plays alone ensure him the foremost place among Swedish dramatists.

The Russian drama, like the Scandinavian, was of late birth. A rich heritage of folklore went to the making of such forms of art as the traditional ballet, which, in our own day, thanks to M. Serge Diaghilev and his troupe of dancers, has exercised its own particular and important influence on the European theatre. Sumarokov (1718–1777) wrote several plays in imitation of Racine and Voltaire and also translated *Hamlet* into Russian. In the

nineteenth century came Gogol, author of *The Inspector General*, Griboyedov, and Ostrovsky, and their works are now considered as the classics of the Russian stage. Tolstoy wrote one of the foremost dramas of the early naturalistic period in *The Power of Darkness* (1886), which is marked by a grand, primitive simplicity; but his best work is not to be found in his plays. *The Lower Depths*, by Maxim Gorky, is another document of faithful observation. Leonid Andreev has written a series of ambitious plays, in which he seeks to give a metaphysical expression to the wrestlings of the individual within the "theatre of the soul." The true genius of the modern Russian drama, however, is generally held to lie in the plays of Chekhov.

ANTON CHEKHOV or TCHEKOFF (1860-1904) was a very prolific writer of short stories. He was also the last and perhaps the greatest of the naturalistic dramatists, and his work is linked with the world-stage through its interpretation by the players of the Moscow Art Theatre. His types are mainly drawn from the *intelligentsia* of pre-revolutionary Russia, and they reflect its introspective melancholy. Of his five longer plays, *Uncle Vanya* (1902)

is perhaps the most completely satisfying; but equally well known are *The Seagull* (1896) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). The drama of post-revolutionary Russia has broken altogether with the past, and Čekhov's plays, like Tolstoy's and Gorky's, are already considered as historical documents.

At first the tendency of the Soviet stage was to concentrate upon "creative direction," as exemplified in the work of Meierhold and Tairov, two of the most distinguished of modern producers. But in the course of time individual dramatists have come forward, some of whom, like Valentin Kataev, author of *Squaring the Circle*, write surprisingly in the traditional Western style. Others take full advantage of the new fluidity in stagecraft and the new architectural dimensions of the Russian stage, and produce plays destined rather to interpret the dramatic mass-consciousness than to express the fantasy of the individual mind. The official view of the stage as a propagandist medium, whether rightly or wrongly, governs the dramatist's own purpose.

In other European countries the drama of our day has followed with more or less docility

the path of Ibsen's making. The American theatre naturally experienced the same influence, but for many decades it received its principal impulse indirectly through the French stage. Bronson Howard, Clyde Fitch, and Augustus Thomas were exponents of the art of the "well-made play." Since then America has produced a dramatist of international reputation in Eugene O'Neill, the author of *Anna Christie*, *Desire Under the Elms*, and the strange episodical piece with a coloured hero, *The Emperor Jones*; also later of *Strange Interlude* and the tragic modern trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Among the many serious writers for the newer American stage are representatives of all the varied schools of dramatic thought, including the most modern school as judged by European standards. It may be noted that the American theatre is especially receptive to new ideas and stage-craft, and therefore to dramatists of original technique. The drama correspondingly seems to be striving after new forms, and is by no means content with following European models; hence in part the rather inchoate impression that it makes upon the foreign observer.

Here we may very well conclude our survey of the dramatist as offspring of the Renaissance. He has travelled far in three or four centuries, and may doubtless be held to have reached years of discretion. In his own achievement he has summarized all the effort of mankind towards an understanding of its common purpose and destiny. He has declared his own faiths and disbeliefs. He has set his face against the shams and prejudices inherited from the Dark Ages, which still cast their shadow upon humanity. He has been no more concerned with personal expression than the artist in any other sphere. But his movement towards individualism and self-discovery has in some sense hampered the theatre, which lives by selfless co-operation. The rise of the intellectual dramatist has been marked, upon the whole, by a decadence of the imaginative drama. Just as Napoleon diminished the glamour of war by making soldiers of civilians, so the Napoleonic playwright, marshalling his battalions of philosophers, has sometimes diminished the glamour of the playhouse and lessened the spectator's child-like but natural pleasure in the dramatic scene. The element of simple delight has been

relegated to a secondary place. Even the conventional theatre of everyday commerce has been imposed upon by the conception of the dramatist as individual artist. Since it does not think for itself, but only acts and produces plays, it has become permeated with borrowed thoughts. It has subordinated the actor to the drama of the fourth wall, the peep-show drama by means of which the playwright simulates reality. It has employed the producer only as a supervisor or foreman who shall precisely interpret the author's purpose. It has embellished the scenery of the stage only in order that it may precisely represent the setting of the author's characters. It has bartered the kingdom of fancy for a province of fact.

In a living theatre the dramatist, like the actor, surrenders himself in some measure to gain his freedom. He gives himself to the stage of form and colour, of winged words and surging harmonies. Granted that the craft he brings is the noblest of the crafts, it will nevertheless dwindle into insignificance if it be imagined to be all-important. The spoken word is not a dogma, but a litany. It is not a pinnacle, but a foundation.

CHAPTER V

THE ACTOR

OF the actor (*agonistes*) in the earliest times we know little, save that he was a vehicle of expression. It is probable that until the time of Sophocles he gave his services without reward. When he became a servant of the Athenian State he enjoyed a certain private dignity, and was generally respected as an artist, but his personality was entirely concealed by mask and costume. The chief requirements for the profession were a retentive memory (since there was no prompter in the Greek theatre) and clear and correct enunciation. His training included singing, dancing and gymnastics. The supple play of gesture, much esteemed by the spectators, required long practice. Actors were assigned to plays by lot, but the chief among them was generally retained by the same poet, and it is not unlikely that declamatory passages were written with this protagonist in view.

It is one of the paradoxes of the theatre that the abandonment of the mask should have been accompanied by a lowering of the actor's social status. The Roman actors, as we have already noted, were hired freedmen or slaves, schooled at the expense of their masters or rich patrons. They made large sums in salaries and gifts. Roscius the comedian and Æsopus the tragedian were wealthy men according to the standards of every age. With the growing magnificence of Roman theatrical productions the actors profited likewise, but their legal position of inferiority was never substantially changed, and the appearance of women on the stage in the licentious mimes did nothing to improve the character of the profession. The earliest women players were frankly prostitutes. The actor, in the decline of Rome, was little more than a living symbol of the degradation of public taste.

Throughout the Middle Ages he remained something of a vagabond. The guildsmen who performed the mysteries were ordinary citizens with private trades, but a multitude of professional actors of pantomimes and buffooneries wandered from fair to fair. Some more fortunate players became attached to courts

or houses of the nobility, where they formed stock companies bearing the name of their patrons. The scenes in *Hamlet* between the Prince and the players are typical of the relation between patron and performer, not in mediæval Denmark, but in the England of Shakespeare's day. Among the actors were nimble-witted men, poets and dramatists in the making, with at least a smattering of scholarship; and these, like their Roman predecessors, enjoyed the friendship of the great. At the time when the Renaissance made its influence felt in all the theatres of Europe the actor's profession was steadily advancing in public esteem, and it has never since looked back. However loose the private morals of the players, they have generally been no more blameworthy than the morals of the world of fashion. From the seventeenth century onward, actresses began also to establish their position in the social sphere. The charming Mrs. Bracegirdle, a heroine of the Restoration stage, was described by Colley Cibber as "now just blooming to her maturity, her reputation as an actress gradually rising with that of her person; never any woman was in such general favour with her spectators, which to the last

scene of her dramatic life she maintained by not being unguarded in her private character. It was even a fashion among the gay and young to have a taste or *tendre* for Mrs. Bracegirdle. She inspired the best authors to write for her; and two of them, when they gave her a lover in the play, seemed palpably to plead their own passion and make their private court to her in fictitious characters." Nearly a century later Mrs. Jordan and Mrs. Siddons made a like impression on the town. David Garrick moved in the circle of Dr. Johnson, who was sometimes churlish towards him and his profession, but praised him heartily as a "very good man, the most cheerful man of his age." Talma was the favourite of Napoleon. Kemble, Edmund Kean, Macready, and Irving in turn left their mark upon the social life of their times. Whatever reproach may have been attached to the actor's calling is long since dissipated, and in our own day public honours have been freely bestowed on leaders of the profession.

We need not labour the parallel between the rise of the dramatist and the rise of the actor since the time of the Renaissance, but it may be noted that both have gained in individual importance. There must have been many

notable players in the opening period of modern dramatic history, but few records of their art have been preserved. Richard Burbage (about 1567-1619) and his contemporary Edward Alleyn are among the earliest actors of whom we know anything definite. They were by no means "stars" in the present-day sense, and are generally described modestly as "sharers" in the fortunes of their company. The first actress of world-wide fame was Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692-1730), the *tragedienne*. The classical period of the Renaissance throughout Europe gave rise to the division of actors, like dramatists, according to their gifts for tragedy and comedy respectively. They sometimes appeared in both forms of drama, but the modern nondescript actor was unknown. We cannot regard him as being entirely the creation of the modern nondescript dramatist, for other forces have been at work in the theatre, continually impelling the actor towards realistic rather than classical modes of expression. To take but one example, the introduction of electric lighting set a premium upon real beauty and youthfulness in the player. The experienced and charming actresses of middle age, who had successfully portrayed heroines of

twenty-five under the dim lamplight of the theatre, were obliged to yield place to young ladies of lesser gifts whose complexions would endure the novel glare. Similar revolutions in the playhouse of an earlier date had their influence on the actor's art. The apron stage of the Elizabethans, partly encircled by spectators, encouraged rhetorical rather than emotional expression. When the stage was withdrawn into its present place, and the grouping of characters was made visible as if in the frame of the proscenium, the effect of facial play was naturally heightened. Given good direction, however, such outward changes need never alter the essentials of good acting.

The actor's art has been much more profoundly modified by the nature of his material, and here we touch one of the truly significant factors in the modern theatre. Many writers have studied the outward changes wrought by the dramatist upon the stage, but few have considered his influence upon the actor's technique. To the actor *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was as epoch-making as *A Doll's House*, since it established naturalistic conventions in the theatre of everyday commerce.

Actors, no less than playwrights, are the children of their age. Consciously or unconsciously, the actors of our own time are the offspring of the "free theatres" that arose in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, with Ibsen, Hauptmann and Shaw as their prophets. The naturalistic spirit has impressed itself deeply upon the actor's mind. He now ceases to think of himself as a tragedian or comedian, but he thinks of himself instead as a "straight" actor, a "character" actor, or a "costume" or Shakespearean actor. "Straight" parts in general embrace all the more ordinary human beings he is called upon to represent; "character" parts allow for the display of certain humours and eccentricities; "costume" parts may or may not require a sympathy with poetic drama. Such a division is evidently confused, but the confusion is not of the actor's making; it arises from the conventions of the theatre in which he works.

The theatre has its periods of greatness and periods of decadence, but the actor's fitness for the stage remains a constant quality. When he is made a ranter, a painted puppet, a toy of luxury, or a model of fashion, it is the theatre

that is at fault. His own permanent virtues are dignity of stage presence, ability to speak verse or prose with precision and understanding, and capacity to interpret the emotional nature of his character. These are, or should be, the actor's general stock-in-trade. Thus there is no special form of acting that we can call Shakespearean. The stage was not made for Shakespeare, but Shakespeare for the stage. We should not regard the actor as a plain human being, who represents his own plain humanity in a score of modern pieces, wearing his own clothes made by his own tailor, employing his own natural tones of voice and natural gestures, and exploiting his own personality for purposes of the stage, until one fine day he is suddenly called upon to put off the garment of himself, to walk before us in godlike shape, to use the language of poetry, to shadow forth an imagined personality of classical creation. Yet this is the common conception of his task. It is said that such and such an actor is admirable in Shakespearean parts, while he fails in the realistic setting of drawing-room comedy. It is said that another is entirely convincing in modern parts, but cannot be imagined in "costume." But there is only one art of

acting, and if there appear to be several we must find the reason in the realism of our ordinary stage, in the dialogue that is the reporting of everyday speech, in the characterization that is the reporting of our everyday selves, in the setting that is a distorted semblance of the mirror held up to nature. Every truly fine performance by an actor is a reproach to this theatre of routine and commonplace, which (in Chekhov's words) shows us "by electric light, in a room with three walls, how ordinary people eat, drink, love, walk, and wear their jackets." For the actor, no less than the dramatist, is a critic of life.

The character played by an actor is not only reproduced, but independently created. It is true that this "creation" has become a part of the jargon of the theatre, signifying little more than a first performance in a rôle. It is true that the creation is secondary, since it arises from an author's study of character. It is true that the impression created is fleeting, but so is the impression of music or the dance. The one permanent feature of the actor's art is the mask that he sets upon the face of life. In the world of the theatre

illusion and reality are one and the same. Acting implies not only an outward harmony of appearance and movement, but an inward symbolism of character, an other-worldliness of creation that transforms life into imagery. The actor implies style in the theatre just as the spoken word of the drama implies style in conversation. The actor implies rhythm and poise and dignity; he is the visible symbol of an imagined fact. The natural mask that we call his technique and the natural movement that we call his stage presence are only the groundwork of his art. Upon them is imposed his other self, his painted self, which is truly the emotional self of the spectator absorbed in the play.

We do not ask of the actor that he shall be a poet. If actors were poets, they would not be actors. Nor do we ask of him that he shall be a critic or a man of letters, who appreciates literary values in every speech he is called upon to utter. If actors were critics, they would be poor actors indeed. Many a Shakespearean performance has been dulled by too much critical consciousness on the actor's part. We do not ask of the actor that he shall have an individual opinion of the drama in which he

appears. None of these matters is properly within his province. We ask that he shall be a symbol, and this is the only reasonable demand. To our eyes he is a symbol of reality, of poetry, of the theatre. If he be truly a symbol, he will appear before us in the guise of a painting and not of a photograph. He will walk the stage of the artist's theatre, not of the theatre of pretended actuality.

Though the masks of tragedy and comedy are long since discarded by the stage, they live in the actor's mind. The tragedian or comedian creates a dramatic figure, while the character actor fumbles in the wardrobe of theatrical tradition. The tragedian or comedian creates a mask, the character actor borrows a disguise. It is easier to borrow a disguise than to create a mask, and therefore the base currency of character acting passes freely on the stage. It is still easier to borrow no disguise at all, but to exploit all the resources of "temperament" or "personality" for the purposes of the theatre; and therefore the stage is always encumbered by individual actors who have nothing to show but themselves. Upon these artists the theatre revenges itself, however, for the playwrights contrive

plays to suit them, and thus the circle of their imprisonment is completed.

Temperament and technique are the two words oftenest used in relation to the actor's craft. Of these temperament is evidently the capacity to feel emotion, and technique the ability to express it. Such a rough-and-ready definition, however, will not help us far to understand the real nature of a plastic performance. The more we speak in terms of logical definition, the farther we remove ourselves from that apprehension which it is the actor's task to evoke. The literary drama calls for literary criticism, and the drama of ideas calls for intellectual criticism; but when we speak of acting neither of these will serve. Acting is much nearer akin to music and painting than to literature and poetry. When we analyse it from a purely intellectual standpoint, the creative principle of movement is forgotten. It is this rhythmic quality in acting that eludes the historian of past generations, and even escapes the memory of the contemporary playgoer. People who have seen a great actor or actress may carry a deep memory of their own personal experience, but they can seldom convey any description of

it to a listener, or even reproduce in their own minds the image that moved them to quick admiration. For this reason alone it is idle to attempt a survey of historical actors, as we have attempted a short survey of historical dramatists. The names of great actors have been handed down to us by memories of tone and movement and stage presence, which are vivid but intangible. The first principles of rhythm are the beginning and the end of their accomplishment. In essentials the actor has not changed at all since the earliest days, when he was a singer and a dancer. Of all the partners in theatrical art he is truly the most constant.

The actor is an amateur. He plies a trade that can be learned by all and is regularly followed by too many. The rules of his craft are simple, if indeed there be any rules. With less practice than the drawing-room pianist or the amateur cricketer, with one-tenth of the expenditure of time and thought needful to play a tolerable hand at bridge, with one-hundredth of the spiritual zest that turns a village blacksmith into a local preacher, an actor may stand upon the stage and pretend to interpret the things of the imagination.

His range of voice and movement may be no greater than that of the practised political speaker; his sense of presence may be matched by that of any lady receiving an afternoon call. His physical fitness, as shown in bright eyes and white teeth, a firm carriage and an elastic step, may be no more remarkable than that of an average spectator. His complexion indeed may be clearer than the common, for the use of lubricant benefits the skin. But by what right does this man walk divinely before his fellow-men? He is no different order of being, but one of ourselves. He stoops to our gestures, he employs our slang, he condescends to our conventional tones, he bends to touch our commoner emotions. The more nearly he represents us, the more clearly is he self-confessed as amateur. The end of naturalistic acting is amateurism. When the actor's eloquence no longer shakes the theatre, when his figure no longer towers above us with gestures of antique greatness, then indeed he and we together are amateurs, for we deserve no theatre and he deserves no audience

The actor is a professional. He is a man with a calling, a man inspired, a man possessed.

He is impelled to give form to a conception of character, he is driven to enter another man's spirit and laugh and weep with him. He is destined to show us man in movement, "in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god." He unfolds the meaning of action and discovers rhythm in the stumbling gait of events. He lends bodily vitality, the bloom of health and the spirit of energy, to all the creatures of his fancy. He animates the portrait of a sick man; we hang upon the lips of the dullards who are transfigured by his radiant art. This proud professional spirit of the actor survives a decadence of the stage. It endures through period after period, classical and romantic, naturalistic, prosaic, poetic. Behind the cloak of amateurism that overspreads our theatre, behind the lifeless gestures of habit and the meaningless march and countermarch of conventional movement, we see the steadfast figure of the interpreter. Behind the pretence of the mirror we see the reality of the mask. The art of acting is greater than the actor; it lifts him above the level of amateurism to which the conventional stage would reduce him. Among all the feeble impulses of the theatre we are conscious,

here and there, of the swift intake of the breath of inspiration. There is no other acting than inspired acting, whether it be tragic or comic or farcical; the rest is vanity of vanities.

The uninspired actor (whom we have called the amateur) does not play his part; he simulates it by the aid of a superficial technique. At the best he gives a mask of caricature to a figure that he fails inwardly to comprehend. He seeks for a fashionable type into which he can mould his own personality. He goes from manager to manager and from comedy to comedy with this type ready-made; and each finds a use for him, since the audience must have style at all costs, and caricature is a form of style. His mannerisms, which should be the legitimate byplay of his art, become in time his entire stock-in-trade. The sound middle actor, without the gift for caricature or the instinct for original portrayal, chooses a sound middle performance from his wardrobe of experience as a man chooses a jacket. The part fits him and that is enough. Much the same is true of the character actor, whose ambitions are chiefly set upon reproducing accent, gesture and

habit. Of a conception of drama deeper than that of the "dramatic" scene, of an inner technique of performance deeper than the outer technique of tone and gesture and facial play, such actors do not begin to think. Theirs is truly the small change of acting, convenient in the pocket, eloquent on the counter, readily given, readily accepted. But the capital of the actor is inspiration.

The everyday theatre pretends to represent actual experience. Lifelike quality is made the test of acting, as of drama. The actor shows us an emotional experience that he is supposed to have undergone. It is made personal to himself; hence the importance of his own personality as a stage asset. But the significance of this personal experience is very slight. Coquelin, the great French actor of the last generation, relates a tale of his own experience on tour. He had passed a sleepless night in travelling, and made an excursion into the country the following day. In the evening he was to play a character who is first made drunk by a companion who seeks to surprise his secrets, and then falls asleep upon the stage. "The drunken scene," he observes, "I played neither better nor worse

than usual. But when the moment came to fall asleep, my task appeared to me so delightful that I yielded myself entirely to the temptation of the part, and slept peacefully in view of the audience. I am ashamed to add that I also began to snore." Here is a dramatic criticism that can be applied to most of the acting we call personal or realistic. Faithful portraiture is only a part—a small part—of the actor's task. It has been truly said that a good portrait is one in which we recognize the painter. So a good piece of acting is one in which we recognize an actor—neither type nor individual, but artist and craftsman. When this is understood the drama of realistic personal experience, with all its elaborate technique of expression, falls to the ground. In its place stand a few symbols erected by the aspirations of the audience, the imagination of the dramatist, and the inspiration of the player.

These are the unchanging symbols of performance. The art of the inspired actor endures. Even in a physical sense he possesses, with Duse and Bernhardt and Ellen Terry, the secret of lasting youth. His body is disciplined by a technique that subordinates

every muscle to the creative impulse. Just as the *ballerina* preserves the suppleness of her limbs by daily exercise, so he preserves the instrument and vessel of his art. This true actor sees an inner world. His parts are not pieced together from the rags of local colour and pretended realism, but are created from an imagined experience; and the act of imagination transfigures his form, beautifies his gestures, and lends rhythm to his words.

Show me your part, says the actor, and I will show you my inspiration. There is no making of bricks without straw. It cannot be said that the actor's virtues, such as his ability to fill the stage, his skilful manipulation of his own natural mask, his bold exaggeration of outline in the portrayal of character, and his physical domination of the audience, are the virtues most esteemed on the everyday stage. A good actor is always a good actor, whether he play in Shakespeare or drawing-room comedy, but the demand for emotional restraint, conversational tones and easy gestures puts a premium on mediocrity. The art that conceals art (in the much-abused phrase) is the only art that serves the actor in a great

number of modern pieces. He will certainly be praised for being natural and blamed for being artificial. He will seldom be allowed that purposeful artifice which is displayed by the greatest painters of human nature. And here the fault lies with the theatre, not with himself.

The actor speaks to us through symbols of reality, just as a poet speaks through images and metaphors. If the metaphors be outworn, we call the poetry commonplace. If the symbols of acting be conventional, we call the performance uninspired. The actor borrows from a world of reality in order to create a world of appearance; that is the essence of his art. It must be a world of reality, and not a world of some playwright's mechanical invention, else the actor must fail to convince. He seeks for enduring symbols that shall express the relation of appearance to reality—for a style and gesture, a tone and presence, that shall maintain a just proportion between the actual and the imaginary. He is confronted with a whole property-room of conventional symbols that are long ago worn threadbare, like the phrases of the novelette. For every emotional emergency, for every turn

and twist of character, the histrionic *clichés* hang in readiness. There is a fitting for every figure. The spectator, aware of the emptiness and banality of these symbols that he has seen a hundred times, calls them "theatrical," and thus lays the blame upon the theatre for what is in fact the player's or the playwright's want of imagination.

But the symbols of the theatre can never be other than theatrical. Every endeavour to make them "real" reverses the actor's natural purpose by re-creating a world of sham reality from the world of appearance. The presence of real donkeys or cascades of real water on the stage gives pleasure to large audiences, but it can scarcely be said to diminish the theatricality of a performance. The actors of the Grand Guignol smear themselves with red ochre to represent a bleeding wound, but the convention does not bring them one step nearer to the naturalism, say, of Ibsen. On the contrary, the more harrowingly "real" the drama becomes, the farther it is removed from the emotional reality of tragedy. The business of the theatre is to be theatrical—that is, to present a mask of life to the spectator. The enduring symbols of

the actor's art are artificial, like the enduring monuments of the sculptor. They do not need to be covered with the rags and tatters of pretended fact.

If we imagine a procession of celebrated players across the stage of history, we find them all to be theatrical in their own manner. Even Eleonora Duse, in whom the naturalistic spirit came to its highest expression, was theatrical. It was said that she insisted upon a bowl of real flowers on her stage, and she rejected the ordinary aids of make-up; but the spiritual experience that animated her gestures belonged to the world of imagination, not to the world of the spectator. The actor indeed is committed to the portrayal of life as we know it, but if his work be well done we should feel that we have never known it before. This was the effect of Duse's art; she made her deepest impression in the act of reaching out to an unknown reality. When we say that an actor creates a part we mean that he not only portrays a character, but interprets a riddle. As portraitist his gifts may range from the photography of the street corner to the mastery of Rembrandt, but as interpreter he establishes his proper right to the stage.

We have purposely avoided speaking of "great" actors and "great" acting, although it is customary to produce all illustrations of the actor's art from the gallery of fame. Individual "greatness" offers even more temptations to the actor than to the playwright. It may mean no more than a vast overgrowth of personality supported by the resources of technical skill. The actor has long since ceased to be an anonymous worker in the cause of theatrical art. Celebrity has been forced upon him by events. He is a public personage, like the statesman and the preacher. Every line of his features and every tone of his voice is familiar. He has gained the power to make the fortunes of plays and playhouses. It is natural that he should rely increasingly upon his physical presence and tend to stereotype the conception of himself. There is no hard-and-fast line that separates good from great acting, but it is certain that many good actors strain needlessly after the mannerisms of individual presence and domination with which "greatness" is confused. Perhaps the theatre would be better served if the names of actors (or for that matter of authors) were never printed on a playbill. But even in

an age of publicity, selfless art counts far more than self-assertion.

The actor, of all the partners in the playhouse, holds the visible key to the temple of illusion. It may be placed in his hands by others, but he holds it none the less surely. The first law of the theatre is that the spectator identifies an author's personages with the living people he actually sees before him. With whom else, indeed, should he identify them? It is not his task to distinguish between good and bad renderings of a playwright's intention. He is not in the theatre for guesswork, but for certainty. He sees people representing imaginary characters in imaginary situations. He becomes absorbed in their fate, he shares the deepest impulses of their being. Therefore the actor must always be the chief emblem of dramatic movement. The quality of a play is tested by the nature of his presentation. In the simplest forms of dramatic entertainment, such as vaudeville, he creates the essentials of character in two words and a gesture. If the legitimate drama appears to offer him a narrower sphere, it actually invests him with even wider powers. It calls for an inward as well as an

outward technique of acting. The more convincing the play, the more assuredly will the audience believe in the player. We may measure the power of drama by the breadth of its opportunities; and therein lies the true significance of the actor's figure.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRODUCER

WE may compare the producer (or stage director) of a play with the conductor of an orchestra. Evidently a conductor is necessary, for the musicians, however skilled they be as individual executants, cannot play a symphony by themselves. The composer may not be ready to hand; and although some composers conduct their own work, there is no certainty that their rendering will be better than the rendering of a professional conductor who has himself composed nothing. No doubt the composer knows best of all what rendering is needed, but it does not in the least follow that he is the best person to secure it.

An author knows best what is meant by his play, but it does not follow that he can himself convey the meaning to the actors or obtain an interpretation from them. Some authors produce their own plays, but unless the plays

be very matter-of-fact and the playwright very businesslike, the result is not likely to be successful. Actors naturally prefer to be directed by a man of the theatre who understands the technicalities of stagecraft. The director or producer thus becomes in the first place an intermediary between the author and the players. His part may be less celebrated than that of the conductor in the world of music, but it is no less significant.

The producer receives the manuscript of a play from a theatrical manager, with the request that he will undertake the task of putting it on the stage. In the course of reading the play he becomes a critic and spectator; indeed we may call him the earliest spectator of a work that exists as yet only in imagination. His first impressions are even more important than the first impressions of the dramatic critic who ultimately sees the performance. He will find no more in the play than his own sensibility permits; he will be able to give no more than he himself possesses. At the same time his share in presentation amounts to a share in creation.

The producer does not even trouble to smile at the stage directions with which the author

has industriously encumbered his text. They do not exist for him. He first of all examines the characters of the play, and thinks about them in relation to the available human material. The casting of the play should be considered as the producer's business, or at least should never be undertaken without the producer's advice. Managers who cast their plays themselves, and then engage a producer to supervise the rehearsals, show very little understanding of the art of production. Such a custom dates properly from the time when actors never read the play but only their parts, and when producers were stage-managers and nothing more. A producer should begin at the beginning, since he is responsible for the whole growth of a play from the original manuscript to the finished performance.

Next the producer turns his attention to the scene, which he considers in much greater detail than the author has ever considered it. Even when it represents a simple modern interior, there are a hundred minor problems to be resolved. The dimensions of the scene and its entrances must be determined before any movements can be jotted down. A list of special "properties" (such as a photograph

album at which one of the characters will glance, or a tea-tray that is to be cleared away at a given moment) must be made for the information of the stage manager. The make-up and costumes of the actors also must be visualised.

Then, bearing all these practical necessities in mind, the producer begins, as it were, to perform the play before himself. He plans tentatively the movements that the characters will make, and ensures that there shall be no crowding or "masking" when the time comes for actual rehearsal. He remembers one or two rough maxims of the theatre—that every movement, like every line, should have a meaning, and that a movement in the midst of a line destroys the effect of the words. He aims at variety without restlessness. In a long duologue, for example, proceeding at a table with two chairs, he will endeavour to make the pair of characters change places in a plausible manner. If they should merely exchange seats in the midst of their conversation the audience would be justly bewildered; but if one of the pair should rise and move away, followed by the other protesting that a misunderstanding has occurred, the oppor-

tunity presents itself for an eventual return to the table with the positions reversed. This simple and apparently banal manœuvre is executed a dozen times in the course of every play. The audience, absorbed in the dramatic spectacle, is almost unaware that the characters are in motion, but it would speedily be aware of any prolonged state of rest. The producer has to sustain an appearance of animation throughout the action of the play. With a little experience he is able to visualize practically the whole of this necessary movement before he meets the company. In a word, he comes to the theatre with his own definite impression of the play in being.

The next stage is rehearsal, at which the actors appear carrying their parts in their hands and reading their words, while they assume the positions pointed out to them by the producer. Should they find a movement awkward, it is modified to suit them. The producer now begins to work by ear as well as by eye. During the reading he corrects an intonation here and there. He listens carefully to separate speeches, and forms his own conception of the *tempo* in which they should be spoken. He invents occasional pieces of

“business” or accompanying action, which are pencilled in the margin of the actor’s part and the prompt copy. Often he accepts an actor’s own suggestion of what may be appropriate. Thus the traditional “business” of Shakespearean performance marks the history of a long collaboration between the actors and producers, lasting through centuries. Even though the prompt copies are lost, the tradition is handed down by word of mouth from player to player.

In general the modern actor makes few suggestions of his own. He comes to rehearsal prepared to be “produced.” He has formed his own ideas about his part, and has an inclination to play it in a certain way: but he confidently leaves the details to his producer. Upon the whole he is right. If there is to be a producer, his should be the decisive voice. It is true there is such a fault as over-producing, which is like the over-training of an athlete or a racehorse; but that is a producer’s fault for which the receptive actor cannot be blamed. Under-production, or an imperfect understanding of the producer’s aim, is much commoner.

The first necessity for the producer is to

grasp his own limitations. He cannot change human nature. He cannot endow a dull actor with temperament; he can get nothing out of a player that is not already in him. Nor can he suppress those qualities in an actor that do not happen to suit him; the rough of character must be taken with the smooth. He studies his cast very much in the same way that an author studies types of character. In any scheme of costume and design their personal needs must be considered. What the producer can and must do is to touch the collective imagination of his cast. If his players believe in him he will get the last ounce of individual talent from each of them, to the advantage of the play.

Experience as an actor is very helpful to a producer. It often happens that he can only convey his shade of meaning by demonstration. His task is not to act, or even to teach acting, but to evoke acting. The hint thrown out in a tone or gesture is the most suggestive. First-rate actors should not produce plays, for they are bound to give their own demonstration of how a part should be handled and thus impose their personal conception. The best producers are occasional actors of no

outstanding talent, who give their little demonstration and then smile at its inadequacy, like an orchestral conductor who has borrowed the instrument from his first violin in order to play a few notes.

It is a commonplace to say that a producer should be in sympathy with his author. What is equally needful is that an author should be in sympathy with his producer, who represents the theatrical point of view. If an author wishes to preserve every line of his work inviolate, he is welcome to write novels or volumes of poetry; but if he seeks the collaboration of other artists in the theatre, he must pay some heed to their advice. In nine cases out of ten a producer's "cuts," for example, benefit the play. The producer's taste should be regarded as the taste of a good spectator. If his eye or ear be offended, the reason should be carefully considered.

Given this mutual understanding between author, producer and cast, the play begins seriously to take shape after a week's rehearsal. It is not quite the play that the author had imagined. Indeed he begins to wonder whether he any longer *sees* his imagined characters at all. The places of these characters have

definitely been taken by the players, who have put the stamp of their own temperament upon them. In the later stages of rehearsal, when typewritten parts are discarded and free tones and gestures come into play, the producer finds his opportunity to build up each separate performance. He checks an actor in the midst of an impassioned speech; he leads him arm-in-arm for a turn or two of the stage; he suggests a reason for the passion that is displayed; he traces a lively history of the thoughts that are supposed to be passing through the character's mind. Snatches of the conversation reach the rest of the company, who smile as they pick up some hints useful to themselves. This interpretation of the play in terms of individual capacity is a task evidently beyond the average author's powers. Most authors, indeed, are unduly impressed by the acting of their plays at rehearsal. To them all is wonderful. They see unexpected qualities appear in their work, and naturally attribute them to the genius of the actor instead of to the nature of the theatre. But the producer knows how much the actor has given, and how much the author has yet to give.

A good producer times his effort at rehearsal very much as a trainer times his effort with the preparation of an athlete or a racehorse. In every cast, however ordinary, there is the making of a good performance if the collective imagination be kindled. There is also a right moment for the performance, a moment when the spark of faith flies from player to player. It is the producer's aim to strike that moment. Before it comes rawness, after it comes staleness. The difference between this moment and all others is that subtle difference between a good and a bad performance which is known to experts of the theatre. A play may sparkle on one evening and fall completely flat on the next. The mood of the audience may vary, indeed; but so also may the mood of the player. Plays are meant to be performed scores and hundreds of times, but a producer is truly interested only in one performance, namely his best. The run of a hundred or five hundred nights is the manager's affair. Properly speaking, plays need to be rehearsed and produced afresh every few weeks during their run, but it seldom happens that even a single rehearsal is called. It is noticeable that during a long run the individual acting often

improves, while the *ensemble* or collective acting almost invariably deteriorates. That is to say, the play itself suffers when the producer's discipline ceases to be felt.

Thus far we have considered the producer as a shrewd and experienced middleman, who helps the actor to convey the author's meaning. If he were nothing more than this, he would still be indispensable to the modern stage. The subtler and more original the author's mind, the more the play stands in need of such faithful interpretation as the producer can give. But when we turn from the theatre of argument to the theatre of poetry, from the theatre of fact to the theatre of fancy, from the theatre of observation to the theatre of design, the producer at once assumes a new importance as the artist-in-chief who controls the entire representation. The producer of a modern realistic play may be said to develop a negative; the producer of a play of fancy rather sets to work to impose an image. Indeed most producers belong to one or other of the two classes, those who develop and those who impose. The development may be sensitive and beautiful, as in the work of Granville-Barker, the leader of modern

producers in England, or of Otto Brahm, the interpreter of Ibsen and Hauptmann in Germany, or of Stanislavsky, the director of the Moscow Art Theatre, and the producer of Chekhov. The imposition may be forceful and arresting, as in the work of Max Reinhardt, the producer of *Sumurun* and *The Miracle*, or of Tairov, director of the Moscow Kamerny Theatre. Here we note a cleavage of taste and opinion between the producer as an author's interpreter and the producer as an artist of the *mise-en-scène*. It is idle to deny that such a cleavage exists. The producers of the great naturalistic dramatists sought to represent the fine flower of life. Their aim was to unite dignity of speech and movement with the most exact and detailed portraiture. They devoted many weeks and sometimes months to the preparation of a play, and studied the detailed appearance and surroundings of their characters with as much pains as the dramatist studied their family history. A reaction against this type of theatrical production was perhaps inevitable. Naturalism, in production at any rate, reached a point when it had no more inspiration to offer. The highest expression of this form of art was attained in the

work of one or two producers, themselves mouthpieces of one or two authors. Younger men with new ambitions entered the dramatic field. Their aim was no longer necessarily to express an author's meaning, but to re-create on the stage, through the medium of actors and scene, an image already existing in the producer's mind.

A producer who sets to work in this way is himself in some sense a dramatist. For drama consists not in words, but in action; and an artist of the theatre who gives joy to multitudes by some splendid mime or puppet-show is a 'greater dramatist than the writer of epigrams about adultery or platitudes about justice. The theatre is continually proving itself greater than the playwright. When plays become too lifelike or too argumentative or too prosaic, the theatre naturally rebels against them. Men of the theatre spring up and endeavour to supplant the picture of life by a livelier and more fantastic picture of their own creation. Some of them are new playwrights, but others are original producers. And since original production not only brings beauty to the theatre, but also kindles the imagination of the playwright, we must regard

the producer as one of the creative partners in theatrical art.

Let us revert for a moment to the original comparison of the producer with the conductor of an orchestra. When he handles a modern play it is plain that his rendering, however distinctive, must be judged in the first place by its fidelity to the author's intention. There is only one way of performing *A Doll's House* or *Arms and the Man*, and for the sake of convenience we may call it the author's way. Here the producer must be content with the rôle of faithful interpreter. But there are many ways of performing Shakespeare, and thus far neither scholars nor playgoers have agreed upon one of them as being absolutely the right way. When the producer approaches such a work as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night*, he may very well resolve to give his own rendering of the play, just as the orchestral conductor resolves to give his own rendering of a Beethoven symphony. And it is just this individual rendering that is valuable. Some modern plays require no producer, or at least are performed without a producer's name on the programme; but no manager now thinks of performing Shakespeare

in such a fashion. Indeed the chief interest of a new Shakespearean production lies in seeing what the producer, as artist and critic, makes of his play. To the stratest sect of the Shakespeareans this view is unacceptable. They claim to know just how Shakespeare should be performed, and they are exasperated when the producer fails to realize their absolute conceptions. But the producer may understand the poet's intention better than they.

We are now speaking of the producer with a definite artistic purpose, who strives to give the impress of theatre-craft to every play he undertakes. Like the playwright and the actor, he will have his failures as well as his successes. Not every type of play will suit his temperament, yet he will be called upon to produce most kinds of plays, modern and classical. His equipment depends upon a rare balance of eye and ear. His sense of grouping and movement must be sure, and he must be able at the same time to give the subtlest intonation to the actor. Should his eye be surer than his ear, he will naturally be tempted to become a spectacular artist. Should his ear be the dominant sense, he will

be attracted more and more by the psychological drama. Further, he requires an absolute authority in the preparation of a play. Who will invest him with such an authority? Not the theatrical manager, who employs him just as he employs an actor. Not the playwright, whose sole concern may be to get his own authority asserted. Not the actor, who is at the best of times an unruly pupil. The producer's authority is of his own making.

This explains why many producers of plays are at the same time theatrical managers, or partners of managers. The producer-manager, like the actor-manager, lays himself open to frequent reproach; but he is able to choose his own plays and actors, to employ his own scenic artists and musicians, and generally to direct affairs with an authority that is more than purely artistic. He is master in his own house, and evidently commands resources of all kinds that are beyond the reach of the unattached producer. The greatest producers of our generation—among them Reinhardt, Stanislavsky and Granville-Barker—have been managers of theatres.

Since we shall presently come to the subject of dramatic scenery, the producer's part in its

creation may be briefly outlined. The producer should be an architect of the scene—neither designer nor scene-painter, but architect. It should be from his indications of practical necessity that the designer prepares his sketches and scene-models. These in turn are executed in the scene-painter's studio under the supervision of producer and designer together. With scenery is bound up the question of lighting. Very great advances have been made in stage lighting since the introduction of electricity, and it is sometimes said that the future of stage scenery lies with the electrician. However that may be, it is certain that the producer must be a lighting expert. His visual effects, however beautifully conceived by the designer of the play, will depend for their execution very largely upon the switchboard. Similarly the entire psychological character of a scene may be made or marred by the manner of its lighting. Since this great power has been put into his hands, together with the most ingenious modern inventions for stage illumination, it is not surprising that the producer should sometimes be carried away by his enthusiasm for the new toy. It is truly much more than a toy; indeed

the illusions of lighting may ultimately take the place of theatrical scenery as it is now understood.

It is in the matter of visual effect that the producer often finds his material unequal to his ambitions. The modern play, whether good or bad, offers little scope for the scenic imagination. One drawing-room is very like another, and one "garden set" resembles another to the last rosebush. The dimensions of the stage decree that the interior of a cottage shall frequently resemble the nave of a cathedral, while a boudoir or bedroom invariably suggests the palatial window of a furniture store. Even should the producer be tempted to give his modern scenery the character of suggestion and style, he may well pause when he reflects that the make-up and costume of the characters will be realistic, like the chairs on which they sit. The fantastic scene requires a fantastic actor, and the producer's flights are evidently limited by the bars of his own convention.

We have now considered the producer as mouthpiece of the dramatist, drill-sergeant of the actor, and architect of the scene. It should be clear that neither author nor player

can do without him. If the producer is seldom mentioned by the critics of the theatre, it does not follow that his part in the creation of a play is secondary or mechanical. It happens only that while the playwright's craft and the actor's craft are open books for all who run to read, the producer's craft is properly understood by men of the theatre alone. Since it is practised only at rehearsal it is properly an anonymous craft, as far as the public is concerned. Producers who force themselves upon their audience are to be mistrusted, for there is more of the showman than the artist in their nature. There is no limelight so aggressive as the producer's limelight, there is no scenery so pretentious as the scenery that is purely decorative. The producer's true watchword is mastery, and not assertion. He works hand in hand with master-playwrights; he labours to school master-actors who shall be fit to interpret masterpieces. He, of all men of the theatre, is the nameless guildsman fashioning his work in obscurity.

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To the actor especially, the producer is leader and companion. There are scores of distinguished actors whose development may

be traced to their training under some single producer, and who cheerfully admit the debt. There are others among the ranks of the "stars" who need nothing but production to raise them to the first rank among artists. When the born producer mounts the stage, the actors will always acclaim him, for he is an emblem of everything they seek in their own art—of the self-surrender that spells freedom and the discipline that spells mastery.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCENE

THE use of scenery is the most obvious of aids to dramatic illusion. In a game of make-believe the first impulse is to attribute a fictitious character to persons; the second is to invest objects with an imaginary importance for the purposes of action. Thus in the Chinese theatre, where scenery preserves a purely childlike symbolism, a plank supported by two chairs represents a bridge over a torrent. It is needless for the hero physically to cross this unsteady bridge; he may stand in the foreground of the stage and stamp his feet to indicate that he is crossing. Similarly, it is needless for him actually to navigate his boat beneath the bridge; with the aid of an oar he indicates his gliding passage. The stage properties consist chiefly of conventional objects which are accepted by the spectators at their imaginary valuation. Thus a parcel wrapped

in red cloth represents a human head, and a flag decorated with a fish indicates water. All changes of scene are made in view of the audience. In the background of the stage are two doorways by which the actors enter and depart respectively. Here we have the greatest possible subordination of the dramatic scene to the dramatic action. Nearly all is imaginary. The actors, however, are much more elaborately made-up than the actors of the Western theatre, and their costumes are often of greater magnificence.

To the Greeks, scenery represented a formal background, whose entrances and exits were reserved for the principal actors in the drama. The painting of the scene had a purely symbolic character, and the Hellenic taste would probably not have approved any simulation of reality. As for the scenery of the Elizabethan playhouse, all the essential things about it are told us by the players in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "Some man or other," says Bottom, rehearsing his company, "must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify Wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whis-

per" Perhaps all was not so rude as this in the Elizabethan theatre. Although the stage was strewn with rushes, and coarse hangings formed the principal decoration, there is evidence that money was freely spent on costumes when splendour was required. Scenery in the modern sense of the word began to be used only after the withdrawal of the stage behind the proscenium; that is to say, in the time of the Restoration in England and of the later Renaissance in Europe generally. When the stage was thus presented to the view of the spectator within the frame of the proscenium arch, it was natural that the stage picture should be embellished accordingly.

We may therefore look upon the scene designer, like other craftsmen of the theatre, as an offspring of the Renaissance. It was not in England, but in Italy and the Roman Empire, that artists showed the most marked impulse towards theatrical expression. In particular the age of Leopold I of Austria (1640-1705), which produced no very remarkable dramatic literature, greatly enriched the accessory arts of the theatre. The exuberant baroque style was fully exploited for purposes of the stage. Vast and complicated structures

were introduced to the scene—some of them mechanical, like the aerial machines and revolving firmaments with which the popular taste for wonderment was gratified, and others in the best sense decorative. The “theatrical engineer” of Leopold I was Burnacini, whose admirable designs for the stage have inspired successive generations of scenic artists and costume designers to the present day. He was essentially a practical artist of the theatre, who revelled in the use of colour and material.

The architecture of the scene, until this period, had been more or less modelled upon the formal patterns of classical antiquity. Woodcuts of the Florentine Renaissance represent the permanent scenes which were used for tragedy and comedy, and it is clear that classical forms predominated in the setting of the *commedia dell' arte*. But the new motive of florid decoration soon destroyed the formality of outline, and the scene became definitely a picture instead of an architectural background. Decorative “wings,” representing buildings or trees, were introduced into the design. Romantic ruins and similar objects were painted on what we should now call the

backcloth. At the same time the mass-effect of construction was preserved, and the whole scene was made a background for processions and pageantry. Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena, theatrical engineer to the court of Charles VI of Austria (1685-1740), was a master in this art of stage design woven of countless architectural patterns. Meanwhile the playhouses and garden-theatres of France and Spain had followed the Italian influence, and the scene was assuming an increasingly pictorial character. In the end the theatrical curtain became an inevitable and appropriate symbol, not only of the division between stage and auditorium, but of a promised revelation of the dramatic scene to the spectator's eyes.

The classical pillars and kindred structures of the eighteenth-century stage were true reflections of the contemporary taste in art, and especially in architecture. Later came the conventional landscape-painting of the stage, which now makes it possible to mount such plays as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest* in the realistic fashion, and likewise delights the spectator of *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Mother Goose*. Indeed the painted canvas "flats" and backcloths of theatrical

commerce, representing scenes of nature, are generally tawdry enough; but the scene-painters may plead with justice that landscape in the theatre offers far greater difficulties than architecture. Colour, perspective and atmosphere have to be very subtly blended if we are to believe in the stage representation of the rustic scene. It happens too often that we are unable to see the wood of illusion for the trees of reality.

The interior scene, as background for the play of everyday life, was developed in the time of Molière. It was by no means as elaborate and detailed as the interior scene of the present day, but consisted rather of three panelled or tapestried walls and two entrances symmetrically placed. The furniture included only such pieces as were absolutely necessary to the action. When a coverlet, for example, was placed upon a table, it might be taken for granted that during the play one of the characters would hide beneath it. The interior scene used in the comedies of Congreve and Sheridan was essentially of this pattern. The conventional decoration of the stage interior persisted until quite recent times. Only two or three forms of scenery

were known to the theatrical producer and painter. The "baronial set" rejoiced in panelled walls, mullioned windows, stags' antlers, and coats of arms, while the scene of humbler domestic life displayed its oaken beams, bare table, rickety chairs, armchair at the hearth, and kettle on the hob. The advent of the modern realistic play led to a much more detailed interior decoration, and it is now fashionable not only to embellish the scene with pieces of period furniture, but to introduce pictures, bric-à-brac, rugs, and all the trifles that lend a lifelike character to a room. A scene of this character is something more than an aid to illusion. It is a part of the illusion. The formal background of old comedy has given place to an informal statement of fact.

Meanwhile the architectural importance of the scene has steadily diminished. Although the baroque taste was florid and extravagant, its stage pictures were definitely composed. There was purpose in every detail. We cannot speak of composition in the stage picture of the ordinary modern interior. The architect of the scene may introduce here and there some interesting motive, such as a staircase

leading to an upper gallery, or a raised background communicating with a terrace; but the effect of the whole is inevitably coloured by realistic necessity. The scene is no longer a decoration for some fanciful dramatic tale. It cannot be a decoration unless the tale be fanciful. Architecture has truly very little place in the modern theatre; but we should remember that the beginnings of the modern scene, as of the classical scene, were architectural, and that composition in the architectural sense is the very essence of stage design.

Now that we have briefly outlined the historical development of the dramatic scene, it may be possible to ask ourselves one or two fundamental questions regarding aids to illusion. For instance, there is the question of whether scenery is necessary at all. A rehearsal of a play in the actors' ordinary clothes, before the background of the bare stage, may move the spectator deeply. In Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the whole of the action takes place in such a setting, and the illusion of reality is complete. The spectator of a play is always absorbed in the drama first of all. He ignores the proscenium

arch or frame of the picture that is presented to him, and he regards the action as a personal experience in which he is himself taking part. This is true not only of the realistic modern play, in which the proscenium is supposed to be the "fourth wall" of an actual room, but also of the historical or classical drama. Why, then, should scenery be needed? Why should not all plays be performed before a plain conventional background, and rely on their own dramatic qualities of illusion rather than on the clumsy efforts of the scene-painter?

It is true that every play worthy of the name can be performed successfully before a pair of curtains, or for that matter before a brick wall. But there is no need to go to these austere lengths. The clamour for "simplicity" generally comes from joyless and colourless people. The appeal to the eye is a legitimate appeal of the theatre which should not be neglected. Dramatic costumes (which are worn even in theatres without scenery) require their appropriate background. The spectator's participation in the drama need be in no wise lessened by the creation of a beautiful stage picture, and it may be much increased. The more good pictures that we see upon the

stage, the less we shall be disposed to tolerate those crude and banal pictures that appear too often within the frame of the proscenium arch. A discriminating playgoer will even take pleasure in examining the technique of scenic expression—the quality of paint on the coarse texture of the scene-painter's canvas, the effects of perspective and varied planes, and the uses of mass and colour. He will discover with interest that the glamour of the scene lies in its artificial character. Painted canvas, for example, is not only cheaper and lighter than real wood, but looks better from the distance of the auditorium. Nothing "real" looks well on the stage. Even the heroine's real Paris gowns would look much better in the shop or the drawing-room. The parade of reality makes a vulgar effect, like the parade of wealth. But good taste is always good taste, and the playgoer's taste for colour and design deserves to be gratified.

We may be sure that a good play is the better for being well dressed and mounted; yet there must be fitness in the decoration. Plays, like people, are not always able to wear their clothes properly. There is nothing more tiresome than the decorated play on which

some painter or designer has been allowed to wreak his will. Generally speaking, a modern stage interior can be built and furnished with good taste, but its decoration is no work for an artist. Any woman of taste can design such a scene; the task is as easy (and as difficult) as the arrangement of a bowl of flowers. But if the play of everyday life offers too little scope to the scenic artist, the play of fancy appears at first sight to offer him too much. He is tempted to regard the scene as a picture pure and simple. He is impressed by the gigantic size of his canvas. A new world of opportunity seems to open before his eyes, and he has visions of tremendous backgrounds of mass and colour, animated by fantastic figures of his own creation. These are delusions very pardonable in a painter, who imagines the picture within the frame of the proscenium arch to be a picture like any other. They are not so pardonable in the producer, under whose direction the painter should work. The producer knows that the scene set for a play can never be compared with a painting hung in a gallery. The painting is absolute and self-complete, but the stage setting is always relative to the actor. Its outline and perspective

must be adjusted to normal human proportions; it will be judged by fitness first and by form and colour afterwards.

For example, in a marionette theatre the scene resembles a setting for a play with living actors. Whether the marionettes be six inches or three feet high, the spectator's vision adjusts itself to the proportion of scene and figures. It is this proportionate relation of the scenery to the puppets that sustains the illusion. The appearance of a human being (however diminutive) on the marionette stage makes a grotesque effect. This background was never designed for human forms. Nor is the stage background designed for marionettes—even for super-marionettes. The scene should neither dwarf nor magnify the figures of the drama. Its fantasy must be of such a character that the normal player, a healthy, human animal of eight to twelve stone in weight, shall reasonably harmonize with his surroundings. Actors always dread that the scene designer will forget them or seek to minimize their dramatic importance. Their fears may be justified. The actor is often forgotten in the designs and scene models that are shown at theatre exhibitions. The painter

tends to imagine the scene as a stationary picture. The actors know that it is moving all the time. The painter composes certain groups of figures and perhaps imagines certain gestures that will harmonize with the lines of his background; but the gestures are never actually made, or if they are made, they are instantly effaced by some other movement. In the stage picture it is idle to look for composition in the painter's sense. We look for composition in the dramatic sense, and that is the producer's business. The stage picture can only represent a work of art under the producer's direction, and for the producer's chosen moment.

In considering the scene as a dramatic composition, let us begin at the beginning. The stage pretends to be flat, but in reality it slopes towards the audience. The actor walks downhill to the footlights, and uphill to the background. Every person who has stood upon a stage is familiar with this "rake," which varies from theatre to theatre. The auditorium slopes likewise, though at a steeper angle. These inclinations are simple conveniences intended to improve the view of the stage from the audience. The "rakè" enables a spectator

in the orchestra seats to see the whole figure and not only the upper part of an actor standing in the background. It lifts him into the field of vision, so to speak. Here we have the first principle of scenic architecture, which is the creation of different stage planes. The stage cannot be made to slope at more than a certain angle determined by the actor's comfort; but it can be built on different levels with great advantage both in visibility and variety of effect. Hence the frequent use of flights of steps, galleries and raised platforms to break up the monotonous level of the stage. In spectacular plays with numerous characters some such device is indispensable. Sixty figures may be made visible on various planes, where a dozen would form an awkward crowd on one level. The actor's dignity is heightened, as it was heightened in the Greek theatre, by raising him a step or two above the level of the ordinary stage. We can now grasp some of the fundamental differences between the stage scene and the painter's picture. The scene is not only three-dimensional, but truly architectural. It is not only composed, but built.

The effects of stage lighting are greatly

enhanced when the scene is designed architecturally. For lighting depends not on the illumination itself, but on the objects it shall strike. Scenic architecture represents a movement to raise a screen, as it were, in place of the flat stage; and it is upon the irregular surface of this screen that the light falls. Stage lighting is now the chief accessory of scenic art. Year by year it encroaches farther upon the scene-painter's province. We can almost foresee the time when the scene will be a composition of light and shade alone. The so-called "glare of the footlights" is already a thing of the past, as far as the legitimate theatre is concerned. It survives only on the stage of vaudeville. In its place appears a deliberate use of light and shade for creative purposes. Lighting properly employed becomes a part of the scenic plan, just as recessed portals and projecting pillars are a part of the plan of a cathedral. Light and shade are among the primary elements of architecture; they are no less important in scenic construction, and they even have an influence of their own upon the technique of acting. Again we see that the lighting expert must be the producer or stage director, working in harmony

with the designer of the scene. The author may be content with the command, "Let there be light," but its execution is a task for practical men of the theatre.

In the use of colour, as in every form of scenic design, boldness is required. The neutral tints that are favoured by a customer at the dressmaker's or the paperhanger's are generally ineffective in the theatre. The designer for the stage does not ask the spectator to live with his pictures, but only to regard them for a passing hour; and this is one of his advantages over the ordinary painter. He can afford the touch of exaggeration. He can freely use primary colours. He can even be gaudy without reproach, for a certain gaudiness is part of the tradition of the theatre. He can (and indeed must) employ all the resources of the electrician's switchboard to give tone to his colour scheme. The successful colourists of the theatre are not painters alone, but artists who have learned by practice in the scenic studio and the costumer's workroom. They know the importance of material and lighting, and they understand how to harmonize these factors so that their finished costumes and scenery shall reproduce

the original sketches in colour as well as in form. There is no such thing as mechanical reproduction of an artist's designs for the stage. Every costume must be adapted if not designed for the wearer. The mass-effect of the dramatic scene is built up at rehearsal, with living actors; and so also the effect of colour is created by patient experiment with tones and lighting effects.

Let us now take a particular example of the problem of dramatic scenery and the manner of its solution. Suppose that a producer desires to present the tragedy of *Hamlet* as faithfully as possible. Although by no means one of Shakespeare's most complicated or spectacular plays, *Hamlet* apparently requires some ten changes of scene. Most of the action passes within and about the castle at Elsinore; but we naturally follow the movement from place to place within the castle, just as Hamlet follows his father's ghost from one part of the terrace to another. The players' scene is evidently suited to a large apartment, such as a dining-hall or state-room. The closet scene calls for an impression of more confined space. The scene of Ophelia's madness is generally held to be a garden-room,

whence she can make her visible exit to the stream; indeed with some producers it is made an actual garden. The churchyard scene, though it requires no conventional landscape, is the richer for an impression of sky and wind and sun. Here are three or four distinct scenes that must be either represented in detail or suggested.

The traditional method (if it may be so called) is to represent them in detail. The tradition, it is true, was not of Elizabethan making. It arose with the universal introduction of painted scenery in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Once the fashion had been set, it was natural that producers should regard *Hamlet* as a succession of realistic scenes, representing a terrace, a state-room, a bedchamber, a garden-room, a churchyard, and so forth. These were the principal settings, occupying the whole stage; minor scenes were played before drop curtains while the next set was being made ready. The visual illusion depended on the scene-painter rather than the architect. However elaborate the scene required by the realistic convention, it had to be painted and furnished and erected every evening for half an hour. The aim of

the designer, according to this tradition, was to convince the spectator that he was assisting at a tragedy in a real mediæval castle, the ground-plan of which might be logically drawn.

For many generations this conventional way of performing *Hamlet* (and Shakespeare in general) was unchallenged. The producer saved himself the trouble of thinking about the scene by ordering so and so many square yards of castle wall or starry sky from the scene-painter's studio. The actor-manager, confidently reiterating the tag that "the play's the thing," succeeded in convincing himself and the spectator that the scene was of no particular consequence. The production was admittedly heavy, cumbersome, and expensive; but these were held to be necessary evils inseparable from the mounting of Shakespeare. Two things united to bring about a change in the form of presentation. One was the advent of the scenic designer, as distinct from the pure scene-painter. The other was the growing need for economy in stagecraft. Once the manager realized that *Hamlet* in ten scenes was beyond his financial resources, the impulse was given towards a simplified set-

ting. Once the conventional scene-painter with his unwieldy painted canvases had been eliminated from the theatre, the way was prepared for the restoration of the architect.

The modern producer desires to perform *Hamlet* with as few changes of scenery as possible. Ideally, he desires to perform the play with a single setting, which shall be a plausible background, with various effects of lighting and embellishments of stage furniture, for the whole of the action. The design of such a setting is clearly an architectural task. Every portion of the scene will be required to serve two or three purposes at least. Thus, if there be a raised platform with a background of sky, it must serve not only as the meeting place of Hamlet and his father's ghost, but as the players' stage, the scene of Ophelia's farewell, and the ceremonial parade-ground of the troops of Fortinbras. If there be a flight of steps, it will serve for all the march and counter-march of movement in the drama, and will ultimately be strewn with the corpses of the chief characters. By the proper use of lighting and re-arrangement of background, the graveyard scene can be plausibly contrived

within the walls of the permanent setting. The scene as a whole must be a thing of beauty, nobly composed and proportioned. Its principal quality, however, must be adaptability. It will be judged by the number of different scenes that it can suggest. Architecturally it does not stand alone, but depends upon the co-operation of the electrician, whose play of light upon its varied planes and surfaces sustains the dramatic illusion.

The performance of *Hamlet* in such a setting marks a return to all the essential conventions of the Elizabethan theatre. The foreground, although not in fact an apron projecting into the midst of the spectators, serves all the true purposes of such a projecting stage. On it are played the more intimate scenes of the tragedy. The background ceases to be merely a picture enclosed within the proscenium frame, and becomes a group of stages composed for a single performance. The saving of time is very great, for however expeditious the business of scene-shifting, waits of three to five minutes are inevitable at each change of scene in the traditional presentation. With the permanent setting the action can be made practically continuous, and the scene-painter's loss is the

spectator's gain, for ruthless "cuts" in the Shakespearean text are no longer imposed upon the producer by necessity. The saving of expense in mounting is no less obvious. It may be that a certain degree of realistic illusion is lost, but much more is gained by the dramatic suggestion which takes the place of a dramatic statement of fact.

This illustration may serve to indicate the lines along which scenic decoration is advancing. Most classical plays can be treated in the same manner as *Hamlet*, and with enough forethought and design can be made to yield their full dramatic effect against a background that is architectural rather than pictorial. Even in the modern play with its conventional interior we see a growing tendency towards the use of the single set, upon which the producer can employ all the varied resources of lighting. The spectacular play, in the realistic sense, is dead. It can no longer compete with the motion picture. The stage shipwreck is a tame and creaky affair beside the real shipwreck of photography, which exhibits a vessel specially chartered to be dashed upon

the rocks, and a film hero or heroine palpably tossed on the crest of a wave. The real horse race, which once gave pleasure to vast audiences in the theatre, is surpassed in sensation by a single film representing the Derby or the Grand National steeplechase. If the stage is to compete with the screen in scenic effect, it must rely upon its own positive advantages. What are these advantages? In the first place, the stage picture is three-dimensional and architectural rather than two-dimensional and pictorial. In the second place, it is graphic and painted rather than colourless and photographic. In the third place, it represents a created background rather than a selected background.

These are evidently the three advantages that should be pressed by the scenic designer. When the stage seeks to represent an actual apartment as a setting for actual characters it is foolishly competing with the motion picture on its own photographic ground. On the other hand, when the stage seeks to suggest an imaginative scene by the architectural aid of the designer, it preserves a true independence of its own and at the same time

maintains an age-long tradition. The gay pageantry of the scene is an integral part of theatrical performance, but in the designer's hands the effect should not be merely spectacular. It should be suggestive and therefore in the dramatic sense creative.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLAYHOUSE

THE development of the playhouse has been briefly outlined in an earlier chapter. It began, as we have seen, in an amphitheatre of seats enclosing the orchestral space. Thence, by gradual process of evolution, it grew into the modern theatre with its stalls and boxes, pit and circle and gallery, raised in successive tiers of seats more or less facing the proscenium. During this same process of evolution the stage gradually receded from its original position in the midst of the playhouse to its present position on the rim of the circle formed by the spectators. The curtain became the visible emblem of the separation between actor and audience. The theatre, which began in the open air, was at first partly and then completely covered over. Its character as a place of occasional festival was gradually

merged into that of a place of regular entertainment. Under the patronage of princes and nobles the playhouse acquired a courtly air, but the popular throng always pressed to its doors and in great measure dictated its artistic direction. Hence is derived the form of the playhouse of the present day, with its barriers rudely marking social distinctions by their separation of the cheaper from the more expensive seats. The form varies from country to country, but is essentially unchanged.

The playhouse faces the street just as the stage faces the audience, with all its allurements, so to speak, in the shop window. Its architectural pretensions are reserved for the frontage. It is built of brick but faced with stone or plaster. It sparkles with lights and renews the mask of gaiety for each performance. The Italian Renaissance set the typical fashion of its style, with a decorated porch, fluted columns, and allegorical figures. Behind all this display, at the end of some dingy passage, is the stage door, giving access to a labyrinth of cheerless flights of steps that suggest the interior of a workhouse. "In front" all is light and warmth and display; "behind" all

is cold logic and grim fact. Thus the theatre sums up in its own character the contrast between illusion and reality.

No one will blame the playhouse for turning its best face to the street, like the department stores, the banks, and even the churches. All the architecture of towns contains an element of sham, and it is fitting that a place of entertainment should take pains to look outwardly as attractive as possible. But the form of the playhouse is very largely traditional, and we may reasonably ask ourselves how much of the tradition is worth preserving. Let us begin with the auditorium, which is roughly in the shape of a horseshoe. Its galleries are raised one above another with a view to crowding the greatest number of spectators into the house. Properly speaking the theatre has room only for one gallery or circle. From galleries above the first the angle of vision is necessarily distorted, and the designer is at the same time cramped in the composition of his stage picture, since he has to allow for distorted "lines of sight." The architect of a truly modern theatre will aim at less elevation and greater depth and breadth in the con-

struction of his auditorium. By carrying the first and only circle forward towards the stage, and broadening the auditorium fanwise from the proscenium arch, it is possible to seat as many persons on two levels as are now seated on four, without enlarging the actual dimensions of the house. The private boxes, generally speaking, are social anachronisms. The orchestra, for non-musical plays, is a needless traditional survival. The patrons of the unreserved seats should have access equally with other members of the audience to the various public rooms and vestibules. Play-going is essentially a social custom, and the social character of the playhouse is better worth preserving than the social differences between members of the audience.

Of the stage, which occupies the whole of the space behind the proscenium, only a part is even visible during the course of a play. What the spectator sees is the area of the stage—one half or two-thirds at most—which is enclosed by the painted scenery. From the back this visible scene resembles a three-walled hut built in the midst of the stage proper. The rest of the space is occupied by scenery, properties,

and lighting appliances. In the "wings," to the right of the stage as it is seen by the spectator, is a place for the prompter. Hence this side of the stage, in the English theatre, is called the "prompt" side, and the other the O.P. ("opposite prompt") side. In most European theatres a hood or rounded box covering the prompter's head is placed in the middle of the stage, near the footlights; and sometimes the lines of the play are read aloud to the players before they speak them. Besides the footlights, various forms of lighting are used, including "spot-lights," projectors, "floats" and other devices whose names are more or less self-explanatory. In height the stage extends to the roof of the theatre, and scenery not in use may be lifted and hung in the space above and behind the proscenium arch. The actors' dressing-rooms occupy rows of corridors round and about, or above, the stage level.

This type of playhouse has existed, with very little change, for some two hundred years. Its form, both "in front" and "behind," is largely traditional. Successive generations of theatre architects have perpetuated its draw-

backs as well as its advantages. They sometimes forget the first principle that every seat should command a view of the stage. They often disregard the actor's claim to comfortable, dry and well-ventilated dressing-rooms. Bathrooms, gymnasias, reading-rooms and similar amenities are seldom or never provided. In the front of the house much space is wasted in tortuous corridors which might be used for cloakrooms and foyers. Partly in consequence of these discomforts, the playhouse itself is not used as regularly and continuously as it might be. Instead of being a centre of artistic life throughout the working day, with rehearsals and readings continually in progress, it is regarded solely as a place for the evening's labour or entertainment, in which no sensible person would spend an hour longer than is absolutely needful.

The stage should evidently be the centre of the theatre's architectural being. As we have seen, it is no longer physically the centre of the playhouse, but has receded behind the proscenium frame. The good theatrical architect will nevertheless regard the stage as his essential feature. In other words, theatres

should be built by theatre men and not by amateurs or speculators. Until full provision is made for the lighting and equipment of the stage, for the storage of scenery, for workshops and wardrobes and rehearsal rooms, there should be no thought for the amenities of the auditorium or the embellishment of the exterior. As far as such equipment is concerned, many theatres of the present day are little more than Victorian museums. From lack of space or faulty construction, they are unable to accept modern installations such as a plaster dome in place of the flat and ineffectual backcloth, or even modern lighting machinery. Most of such practical difficulties arise from the fact that the stage, to the mind of the architect, was an afterthought.

Since this is the haphazard and makeshift character of the ordinary theatre, it is natural that theatre reformers should turn their thoughts to the building (at least in their own imagination) of a model playhouse. Sometimes this structure is called a National Theatre, and is conceived to stand four-square in marble majesty on the finest site to be obtained in a metropolis. Its broad flight

of steps is pictured ascending from an ample frontage. Its tall classical pillars support a pediment worthy of the Parthenon frieze. Its flanks and rear are freed from the encumbrance of other buildings. The porch rises to the height of the roof, and the spacious entrance hall has great staircases on either hand. The auditorium consists of one or two immense tiers, in which every spectator, comfortably seated, directly faces the stage. A smaller house for intimate plays adjoins this main theatre. The rear portion of the building is a hive of dressing-rooms, rehearsal-rooms, wardrobes, scenic studios and theatrical libraries. Citizens point proudly to this edifice as they pass its doors. Here, they say to one another, is an emblem of the dignity of dramatic art.

Noble playhouse and noble dream! To grant its visionary character is not to dispute its splendour. Indeed it may not be altogether visionary. Such temples are sometimes built by men who have made jam or motor-cars enough, and seek to leave the world a more enduring memorial of their worth. They are even built by governments with cultural

aspirations. Germany was always ready to build them, and to maintain them out of State or royal revenues. A national theatre arose in France at the time of the Revolution, and has ever since been State-endowed. It is well that such a playhouse should be visualized, even though it be never realized. The very conception implies a return to the finer purpose of the classical drama. There is room for all the shopkeeping theatres of everyday commerce, but there is a need for the theatre that stands for art alone.

Even though such model playhouses remain unbuilt, new impulses in the drama find expression in theatres of a new pattern. The repertory theatre, for example, symbolizes many of the aspirations of present-day drama. Properly speaking a repertory theatre is a playhouse with a stock company, presenting frequent changes of bill. In many European cities this is the only form of regular theatre. A new play is rehearsed and performed, say, once a fortnight throughout the dramatic season. It is repeated three or four times during the first week of its production, and then once or twice weekly for several months or

even years. The total number of performances may run into hundreds, but they are spread over a long period instead of being limited to the duration of a "run." Similarly the number of performances may be only half a dozen, but their lack of appeal does not involve the management in heavy losses, for there is always another play ready to take the place of the failure. Some ten or twelve different plays are held in readiness for immediate performance, and the bill can be changed at the shortest notice according to the relative drawing power of the repertory. National theatres such as the Théâtre Français or Odéon in Paris, the majority of provincial theatres in Germany, and touring companies of opera in all countries, are conducted on this system. It offers many advantages to the actor who enjoys at the same time security of employment and variety of parts. Since the risks of financial failure are reduced, the author finds it easier to get his plays performed. Such a theatre is able to keep one or two producers fully occupied, and the scenery can be constructed or modified in its own workshops at a minimum of expense. In effect, the repertory theatre attempts to modify the

bill in accordance with the law of supply and demand.

A drawback from the dramatist's point of view is the limited range of casting. All stock companies tend to become stereotyped in their composition. On the other hand, the actor comes mentally fresh to each performance. In England the repertory theatre generally changes its bill weekly instead of nightly, because few playhouses are built with space enough to store scenery for several plays at a time, and also because the theatre has to compete with the ordinary touring company on its own ground. Moreover, no manager has yet succeeded in accustoming the public to a nightly change. There is of course no reason why a repertory theatre should produce better plays than any other theatre; the system of a varied dramatic bill is a pure convenience. Under good management, however, the repertory theatre naturally becomes an object of civic interest and pride. It creates a new body of spectators by whose help it is enabled to be more adventurous than the ordinary theatre which is simply a halting-place for touring companies.

Here we reach the all-important link

between theatre and audience. The playhouse may be either imposed upon the popular will or created by the popular desire. In order that it may be created and not imposed, there must first be a certain nucleus of cultivated taste and opinion. All capital cities contain such an elementary audience. In countries where the metropolitan spirit is predominant or overgrown, as in France and England, the purely commercial theatre takes advantage of the metropolitan nucleus of taste to impose its own output of plays upon the provinces. But in Germany, where the old provincial capitals preserve their individual culture, in America, where old and new capitals take a pride in their independence of New York, and in the smaller European capitals, where the tradition of a Court-endowed or State-supported theatre is inherited from the eighteenth century, the theatre naturally has far greater possibilities of local significance.

The chief merit of the repertory theatre lies in the fact that it is a community playhouse and town hall of drama. Where there is money enough to equip such a theatre properly either from the general wealth of the community or from the benefactions of private

patrons, it becomes an emblem of dramatic art. Good plays can be performed in a house of four bare walls, just as good religion can be preached in a village Bethel; but the symbolism of a noble playhouse has a value of its own, like the symbolism of a great cathedral. The theatre beautiful—which is not only the theatre beautifully built, but the theatre gay and sociable—must always be the proper home of drama.

CHAPTER IX

THE AUDIENCE

DRAMA is a work of collaboration not only between author and actor and producer, but between them all and their audience. Without an audience there can evidently be no play. It is this visible assemblage of spectators, this momentary unity of tastes, in a word this collective response that distinguishes the drama from other forms of art. The link between stage and spectator may be poetic and ecstatic, as it was in the Greek theatre; or religious and boisterous, as in the theatre of the Middle Ages; or popular and imaginative, as in the theatre of the Elizabethans; or aristocratic and fashionable, as in the theatre of the Restoration; or sentimental and melodramatic, as in the theatre of the nineteenth century; or social and critical, as in the theatre of our own day. But the link is always established; and in so far as drama

mirrors life, it mirrors the spiritual feeling of its audience. We must therefore think of the audience not only as a passive witness of the dramatic spectacle, but as an active and creative participant. Periods of greatness in dramatic art have always reflected an awakening of social consciousness, like that of the Athenian civilization at its height and of the stirring and adventurous age of the Renaissance. In the same way, periods of littleness have always reflected an indifference to the theatre and a withdrawal of cultivated minds to other forms of expression. A drama that is despised (as it was despised by some of the best writers of the nineteenth century, for example) can produce no masterpieces. A drama that is respected and fostered by general interest gives of its noblest in return.

The tragic chorus of Greek drama has been considered by some writers as representing the "ideal spectator" who shall interpret the dramatist's message to the multitude. But if we regard the audience as the true creator of drama, there is no need to idealize any individual member of the audience. If the Elizabethan drama was loftier in conception

and expression than the drama of our day, we need not suppose that the Elizabethan audience consisted of individuals any more cultivated than ourselves. On the contrary, a great part of the audience of Marlowe, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson consisted of unlettered men, and their taste for crude scenes of violence and buffoonery is reflected in many passages of the Elizabethan plays. The more scholarly part of the audience probably looked disdainfully upon this aspect of the drama. The vitality of the theatre lay in the general consciousness to which the dramatist appealed. If the comedies of Molière were more radiant, subtler, and even more modern than most of our drawing-room comedies, it was not because the courtiers of Louis XIV were individually paragons of culture and wit. On the contrary, most of them were very ordinary people, preoccupied with their own clothes and intrigues and amours, and rather offended than pleased (as we gather from Molière's *placets*) by some of the pictures of life that were shown them by the dramatist. It was no ideal society that moved in the gardens and halls of Versailles. The vitality of the theatre lay in

the fitness of the setting—in the leisurely and spacious and graceful character of the social scene. So it was also with the comedy of the English Restoration, which was played before an audience not only of dandies and great ladies but of bullies and women of the town. So it is with the social dramas of Ibsen, which are played before an audience equipped with no special intellectual gifts, but alive to ideas and aware of the significance of changing times. There is no ideal audience and no ideal spectator; but there are hours in the history of human experience that are more favourable than others to the making of drama. The dramatist himself cannot create his hour, but he can use it when it comes. The creation of the hour is in the hands of multitudes who know nothing of art or literature, but go about their daily task which is the making of social history. Therefore when we say that the audience is the creator of drama, we mean not only the assemblage of spectators in the theatre, but the general body of mankind of which this assemblage is the visible and conscious expression.

Theatrical managers are accustomed to call
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their audience "the public." This is a tribute to the universal appeal of drama; but it leads them too readily to imagine that there is only one public. Thus one play is described as being above the heads of the public, while another is held to be just what the public wants. Large sums are lost every year in the endeavour to satisfy the needs of an imaginary general public; but since fortunes are made by the same process of guesswork, the gamble is popular. In reality, of course, there are many different publics of different tastes. There is always an undiscovered public, like the cultivated public of the later nineteenth century which had given the theatre up for lost and was recalled to its portals only by the appeal of Ibsen and the social drama. There is a public for every play that is good of its kind, whether it be Shakespeare or musical comedy. The intelligent manager chooses his own public from the many that are available. He does not seek to "educate" this public, which consists of people as well educated as himself. He applies himself to the task of sharing his own tastes with them. He may lose money at times, but he never loses as much as his

brother manager who spends a lifetime in groping blindly for the elements of popular success. To the latter "the public" is not a reality, but an obsession.

Apart altogether from the merits of drama, the audience of the playhouse is a continually changing quantity. Theatres enjoy mysterious "booms" and suffer unexplained periods of depression. All sudden changes—even sudden changes in the weather—affect them adversely. The European War, far from quickening the imaginative mind of the playgoer, reduced most of the theatres in belligerent countries to the lowest level of taste they had reached for generations. A political crisis, a transport strike or a period of Court mourning may spell catastrophe to the world of entertainment. It is no wonder, perhaps, that the manager is inclined to generalize about the vagaries of his public, and even to regard them with a kind of superstitious awe. A certain number of unknown people, determined by the law of averages, present themselves nightly at his doors. Who shall say how many of them represent the attraction of a certain player in the cast, or how many are allured by the arts of general advertisement,

or how many respond to the notices that have appeared in the Press? Their patronage is suddenly given and as suddenly withdrawn. They appear to be creatures of the strangest moods and fancies. Their very applause is unaccountable. On one evening they laugh heartily at a line which on the next is received in silence. They are by turns warm and cold, grave and gay, docile and stubborn. The players feel this variation in the mood of the audience before ten minutes of the first act have passed, and comment upon it among themselves in the intervals. In part, no doubt, the riddle of the audience consists in its magnitude. For every person who reads a successful book, ten persons see a successful play. This huge anonymous body of spectators passes through the door of the theatre and leaves no trace behind. Generally speaking, it knows nothing of authors and little of actors. It sits for two or three hours absorbed in the spectacle of the stage, and then vanishes into a night of forgetfulness.

The rough-and-ready science of the theatre consists in an experienced knowledge of what the audience will like. The manager knows

that certain stock situations can always be relied upon to excite dramatic interest. The actor knows that certain gestures and intonations will always evoke a momentary response. The playwright can point more or less confidently to the lines of his play that will "get a laugh." Within the limits of ordinary experience the psychology of the audience is pretty well explored. In many plays no attempt is made to venture beyond these limits; and the ease with which the conventional effect is obtained encourages the manager to believe that he has judged the public taste correctly. Audiences, however, are as pliable as they are fickle. It is the easiest matter in the world to make them laugh, and very little harder to make them weep. One play may arouse incessant laughter without truly delighting the audience at all. Another may bring them to the point of tears without truly moving them. The conventional manager and actor are bewildered by these continual paradoxes, but it does not occur to them that the error of judgment is their own. There are many different qualities of laughter and tears—perhaps as many as there are varieties of the "public." Some of

them at least indicate reaction without pleasure. An actor in the lighter sort of verbal comedy has only to wait long enough for his laugh at the end of a line, and he will be sure to get it. His audience laughs from pure politeness—to break the awkward pause, so to speak. An actor in the heavier sort of sentimental piece has only to give a stereotyped emotional inflection to his voice, and a large part of his audience will soon be furtively wiping their eyes. But it does not follow that they are either deeply amused or deeply stirred. The theatre is full of shallow impressions.

It is no article of faith, but a matter of certainty, that the audience is truly moved by sincerity alone. The listener asks sincerity not only from the author, but from the players, the production, the presentation of the drama as a whole. Sentimentality, which is sentiment insincerely felt, may celebrate its momentary triumphs. Witticism, which is wit run to seed, may set the house in a titter. The one thing that permanently counts is conviction, and this is the quality that the shop-keeping theatre, seeking to gratify a desire rather than to satisfy a taste, can

seldom offer. The manager who stands bewildered before his public becomes its slave and not its partner. He does not know what the audience wants. If he knew, he would be a multi-millionaire instead of an occasionally successful gambler. All he understands is the immediate reaction of the audience to the stimulus of entertainment. He becomes obsessed with the notion of "putting the play across," of making it immediately intelligible in terms of the stage. A perfectly sincere play can thus be insincerely played and presented. This is one of the commonest ways of debasing the currency of drama. But the manager who produces plays to please himself is likely in the long run to please his audience. He at least frees his mind from the delusions about crowd psychology that are commonly harboured in the theatre. Audiences, like all other crowds, can be generous and brutal, noble and slavish, sensitive and callous. There is no shadow of reason in regarding them as anything but a gathering of individuals with individual tastes. It is true that their moods are magnified in the theatre, but at the same time their perception is quickened. Far from being more

easily deceived than individual people in everyday life, they are more alert and observant. It is idle for author or actor or manager to throw the tub of insincerity to the popular whale. It may be swallowed but never digested with satisfaction.

Although the theatre is free to choose its patrons from many different audiences with varied tastes, the playgoing public is, or should be, a microcosm of the people as a whole. It should represent the town, the city and the nation, without distinction of persons. Something like this representative character has been achieved in various periods of dramatic history. The free Athenians in their playhouse were types of an entire civilization. So also were the Romans assembled at the dramatic spectacle. The mediæval mysteries and the moralities appealed to all sorts and conditions of men. We have already touched upon the popular character of the Elizabethan playhouse. The romantics who wrote for the French post-revolutionary theatre sought to summon the whole of their countrymen as listeners. Part of the vitality of the present-day American theatre is due to the comparative absence of social differences

among the audience. It is one of the oldest and most honourable traditions of the play-house that its doors should be open to the multitude.

Is our general civilization represented, in this sense, by the playgoing public? We must admit that it is not. Plays are produced, in the first instance, only in capitals or great cities. There they are performed before audiences composed principally of *hotel-dwellers and residents of the central part of the city or the well-to-do suburbs.* In the audience of the theatres, as in that of the churches, women largely predominate. The prices of admission, which are governed by high rentals and overhead charges, tend to restrict the pleasures of the theatre to a limited number of people. Touring companies, which visit provincial towns, make their appeal to a similar limited audience on a smaller scale. The serious drama barely touches the fringe of the ordinary workaday world. The theatre of to-day is less popular, in a certain sense, than the theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Under the protection of princes and courtiers it was in closer touch with the mind of the common

man than it is now, under the patronage of comfort. The drama is only one of the arts that have lessened their hold upon the mass of the people since the introduction of machinery and the general increase in material wealth; but since it is traditionally the popular art, we can measure the extent of the change.

The comfortable audience is necessarily class-conscious. It supports many good plays but it has a decided leaning to the side of safety and decorum. It abhors social indiscretions of every sort. Its favourite actors are those whose art does not too greatly perturb the listener's mind. Thus it prefers fine and sensitive players of light comedy to all other performers, and it is most at home with them when they make an easy, graceful, naturalistic approach to their parts. It takes a simple pleasure in seeing well-dressed people moving on the stage. If a drawing-room is to be represented, it likes to see good furniture and bright chintzes and all the details of realistic decoration. Provided these conditions be fulfilled, the comfortable audience will accept a vast amount of uncomfortable philosophy from the dramatist. It will laugh

at his bitterest sallies, and enjoy his keenest thrusts at its own self-satisfaction. It is natural that the theatrical manager should wish to please this limited public on whom his livelihood depends. He wants "the right class of people" to visit his playhouse. To the multitude he does not pretend to appeal. We need not wonder that his wares should often bear the stamp of gentility first and art afterwards.

The popular audience, on the other hand, is not theatrically conscious enough to be class-conscious. It takes its pleasures as it finds them. It enjoys melodrama, pantomime, vaudeville and the motion-pictures with a cheerful catholicity of taste. It enjoys Shakespeare when his plays are presented in a popular form. It does not enjoy, generally speaking, the realistic dramas of its own life that are thrust upon it by well-meaning reformers. It goes to the theatre, as all men should go, to see something out of the common presented on the stage. The cheapness of entertainment is evidently a principal consideration with this audience. Cheapness is one of the main attractions of the motion-picture. If it were possible to see good plays

and good acting for the price of a seat in the picture palace, a new and vast audience of the theatre would soon be recruited from the spectators of dramatic photography.

We must therefore admit that the problem of the theatre is not only artistic, but social. The well-being of drama depends upon a constant enlargement of the audience as a whole. Two generations have passed since the establishment of free and compulsory education in most civilized countries. We see the fruits not only in the baser sort of cheap literature, but in the countless editions of the classics that are placed within the reach of all—not only in the baser sort of journalism, but in the popular journals that give art and literature their place in daily life. Has the theatre anything to show for this immense growth of popular cultivation, this keen and universal interest in things of the mind? If heads are to be counted, the theatre has enormously increased its appeal. Plays were formerly considered successful if they ran for fifty or a hundred nights; they may now reach five hundred or a thousand performances. There is a considerable public for modern plays that once reckoned their

listeners by the handful. Yet the theatre is still fettered by social and economic chains. It is exploited by tradesmen and speculators. The age in which we live has suffered much, and has unfathomed wells of passion and pity at the service of the dramatist. Its faith in the conventional stuff of the theatre is already shaken, but it has yet to join in the forward surge that shall give the drama its rightful place in the forefront of art and letters.

What are the prospects of this greater enlargement of the dramatic audience? The hope lies not only in the more adventurous spirit of the everyday theatre, and in the activities of professional producing societies in the cities, but also in the impulse of amateur production and performance. The audience of the village and the factory town, once it is stirred by the will to dramatic expression, contributes its own handful of spectators to the general movement. The audience of the dramatic society that does not even produce plays, but distributes parts and arranges play-readings among its members, brings another contribution. Thus in America, side by side with the extremely commercialized

theatre of the cities, the "Little Theatre Movement" has already made a widespread impression upon the dramatic taste of the towns. Its achievements are sometimes rude and primitive, but they contain the seed of a dramatic revival. The dramatic societies of England and the popular theatres of Middle Europe are moving in a like direction. A National Theatre, properly understood, is a people's theatre—a monument of the highest achievement in dramatic art and also an emblem of the universal dramatic consciousness.

Before leaving the subject of the audience, we should consider one part of it which professionally interprets the feeling of the whole. The dramatic critic is not the "ideal spectator." The conditions under which he works are far from ideal. He sees more plays in a year than it is good for most men to see in a lifetime. In the space of half an hour at the end of a performance he has to collect his thoughts and commit them to paper. The sheets are snatched from his elbow by the printer's boy. His views are necessarily hasty, yet they may be sensitive and truly

representative. Criticism is not a science, but an art. It aims at recording an impression, but above all it voices a response. The critic fulfils his task neither as a representative of the Press (which exists as an entity only in the minds of its readers) nor as a trustee for public opinion (which will exist only when he has helped to form it), but as an interpreter of thoughts comprehended and emotions felt. The critic is aware of an art as well as an experience, and therein lies his value to the theatre. Response comes to all, complete understanding perhaps to few. The critic as spectator formulates his own conception of the play. To every action, as the physicists declare, there is an equal and opposite reaction. So it is with the action of drama and audience. The playwright and the actor are naturally aware of critical opposition rather than critical response, but the critic also is creative. He gives something more than his own individual opinion when he enters the service of the theatre. A good criticism will live longer than a poor play. A good critic describes his own pleasure or displeasure in lively terms, but he is moved also by the age-long

dramatic impulse that springs from the vitality of the audience.

The prospects of enlarging the audience of drama are often held to depend upon the dramatist alone. When the stage encounters one of its periods of depression the managers invariably complain of the dearth of good plays. The cry is taken up by the dramatic critics and echoed by the leader-writers of the Press. But the impulse of the dramatist himself depends upon the impulse of the theatre and its body of spectators. It is even possible that a dearth of good plays may result from an exaggeration of the dramatist's individual effort. If the whole burden of labour is to be conceived as falling upon his shoulders, he may well be allowed his breathing-spaces of inactivity or his periods of impotence. A renewal of the art of presentation—which is to say, a renewal of the spirit of theatre and audience alike—may well inspire him to renewed activity. If the impulse of the dramatist were all-important, the public would not tire so quickly of the good plays of last century or last decade or yesterday. The transient character of their appeal is itself a criticism of the theatre.

They grow old before their time because they live too fast; they pass out of date partly by reason of their own self-sufficiency. If we seek for the springs of youth in theatrical art they lie in the spirit of the playhouse and the mind of the spectator.

CHAPTER X

DRAMA PRESENT AND FUTURE

THE drama, says the modern pessimist, is not what it used to be. Fortunately we can make the classical reply that it never was. The existence of the drama has been threatened a score of times in the course of history, and it has always survived. The Roman theatre had to contend with the rivalry of the circus, and the Elizabethan and Restoration theatres with that of the puppet shows. Italian singers, French dancers, acrobats and performing animals have temporarily lured away the audience of the drama at various periods. The theatrical manager now finds his bugbear in the motion-pictures, or in broadcasting, or in the amusements of an exhibition, or in the cheap motor-car which makes the countryside accessible to the townsman on spring and summer evenings. These are only the habitual grumbings of the

purveyor of entertainment, for in his next breath the manager will declare truthfully that if people really want to see a play, no form of counter-attraction will keep them out of the theatre.

The motion-picture, which appears at first sight to be the most serious rival of the spoken drama, is definitely limited by the bounds of photography. It quickens the dramatic sense of the spectator without being able completely to satisfy his dramatic needs. Its most ambitious experiments in new forms of technique are no more than reflections of similar experiments on the dramatic stage. The "pictures" are still in the infancy of invention. They may yet be made stereoscopic and polychrome. They may even be synchronized with phonography or wireless telephony, so that the figures in the drama of the screen resemble living actors and speak with a semblance of the human voice. The legitimate actor will nevertheless hold his own against them, if only because his emotional art possesses the freshness of an original momentary creation, while the art of photography reproduces an emotional impression at some moment in the past. The dramatic need is

always for the first-hand impression. The magic of the theatre consists in seeing actual people play imaginary parts. Their performance, as the spectator knows, will vary from day to day. It will possess the defects and the qualities of good handicraft, and will not bear the printed stamp of uniformity and reproduction.

The broadcast play, like the motion-picture play, is developing its own technique of construction, but here again there is no question of serious rivalry with the theatre. Broadcasting may eventually threaten the existence of the newspaper, but not of the drama. As for the motor-car, it brings as many people to the playhouse as it takes away. One of the hopes of the future is an improvement in transport facilities which will bring about a decentralization of theatrical areas and enable city-dwellers, for example, to go to the play in new theatres built amidst rural surroundings, twenty or thirty miles from the urban centre. Here is one solution of the problem of high ground-rents and suitable sites. Already, in most large cities, there is a movement towards such theatrical decentralization. In London and New York the suburban or

semi-suburban theatres begin to play an important part in dramatic affairs. In Paris and Berlin the most progressive theatres are those on the outer fringe of the world of entertainment.

We need not envisage any fundamental change in the theatre as a popular institution. If the drama appears to stand hesitatingly at cross-roads, if its appeal at any given moment appears to be diminishing, we must seek the reason within the theatre and not without. Every progressive movement in the arts is bound to come, sooner or later, to a halt. Its impulse grows exhausted; new ideas and new forms are needed to renew its vitality. Upon the whole, the progressive movement in the drama of our own day has been naturalistic. It has also been social, intellectual, and critical, but its most universal quality has been a lifelike character. The theatre of everyday commerce, no less than the "advanced" or pioneering theatre, has accepted the lifelike conventions and converted them to its own use. In acting, in mounting, in production the endeavour has been to represent the outward semblance of life as closely as possible. Already the voices of the leaders in the next

dramatic movement begin to be heard. Naturalism or "realism" is as vigorously assailed as it was formerly praised. The new revolutionaries of the theatre, as uncertain of their aims as most other revolutionaries, cry out for a number of different things. Many of them, for example, rally to the banner of "poetic drama." But all drama should be poetic. Are we to deny the name of poet to Chekhov, in whose plays the naturalistic method came to the height of expression? We must think and speak clearly, if we are to understand what is passing in the theatre to-day.

It cannot be repeated too often that dramatic naturalism, like naturalism in painting, is a definite form of art. It may not be the highest form, but it represents a creative purpose and not a reproduction of reality. Naturalism is not, and never was, photographic. Its masterpieces stand before us, and we may reasonably doubt whether it has anything more to give; but as a creative method it deserves respect. A great deal of banal and ordinary drama is due to the naturalistic impulse. But a great deal of banal and ordinary drama was due in Shakespeare's day

to the romantic impulse, and in Racine's day to the classical impulse. Every school has had its indifferent practitioners. Every form that was ever introduced into the theatre has tended at some time or other to cramp the actor's style, to limit the producer's vision, and to stereotype the scenic decoration. In the history of the theatre we constantly meet with the complaint that actors trained in the conventions of one dramatic school are unable to adapt themselves to the conventions of the next. Before attributing the faults of the present-day theatre to the "realistic" influence, we should first make clear in our own minds the difference between naturalism as an art form and naturalism as a habit. The drama of Hauptmann or Chekhov represents creative naturalism, but the actor's naturalistic tones and gestures are often merely habitual.

Nor should we conclude too hastily that dramatic naturalism is already played out. There is no particular span of life, such as threescore years and ten, that can be allotted to any school of art. In every country able writers are still engaged in composing naturalistic plays, and they are aided by the resources

of an art of presentation that has by now become traditional. It is possible that we may yet witness a second flowering of naturalistic drama. It is certain that the masterpieces of this method have not yet exhausted their appeal. Nevertheless we may be sure that the age of dramatic naturalism, which began in the latter part of the nineteenth century, will not endure for ever. We may be equally sure that some examples of the newer drama deserve attention, not only for their own merits, but for the indication they give of the movement that is taking place in men's minds.

Here again it is necessary to think in terms of the theatre, and not only of the dramatist. Playgoers and critics whose eyes are fixed upon the dramatist alone will sometimes deny the very existence of a dramatic movement. Movements, they say, are what authors happen to make them. There is no such form as naturalism, but only such an individual as the dramatist, who happens to adopt a convenient idiom. They point to such a phenomenal writer as Bernard Shaw, who began as an interpreter of what he called "Ibsenism" and proceeded to write a series of plays that refuse

to be assigned to any category. Where is the naturalism, they ask, in this lively world of intellectual passion and logical fancy? Yet the strictly scientific view of human nature upon which the author of *Back to Methuselah* lays stress is in itself naturalistic. He claims normality of vision, which is shared with him by only one-tenth of mankind. To the remaining nine-tenths he is an iconoclast, a mountebank, or an enigma; but to the minority who share his type of vision he is evidently the most naturalistic of writers. His very idiom, so personal and individual, belongs to the general movement.

It is the theatre, and not only the dramatist, that seeks new forms of expression. The theatre has a collective mind of its own. It has a collective taste, a collective way of regarding the pageant of life which is its everlasting subject. And this mind changes, this taste varies. Just as painters alter their technique, so the theatre alters its perspective. If we stand in a gallery of modern paintings representative, say, of the best work of fifty years ago, we may imagine how revolutionary and even incomprehensible some of the earliest of them must have appeared to the academic

spectator of their own day. Now that the eye is better trained by experience, these same works appear almost academic in their turn. The new paintings of the youngest moderns are now those that astonish or bewilder. It matters little that every phase of modern art produces some trivial works; every phase produces also some works of enduring quality.

The playwrights who first discarded the aside and the soliloquy, with a view to making their action more plausible, were once regarded as bold revolutionaries. We now ask ourselves why they should have troubled about such trifles. The dramatist's task is to say something worth saying to his audience, whether the stage at the moment be occupied by one person or a dozen. The aside may have been an easy and overworked theatrical device, but the soliloquy proper was always valuable. The naturalistic technique of drama was itself misunderstood when it was first introduced. The plays of Chekhov, for example, were once received with something like derision in Western Europe. Their idiom is now better appreciated, but the theatre moves slowly. It is always discovering the works of yesterday.

Original dramatists may have to face a generation of neglect before they come into their own. Some writers for the theatre, like the impressionist painters of the end of the last century, now seek to give the essentials rather than the details of dramatic action and portraiture. This form of expression is already familiar not only in painting, but in music and narrative literature. The actors are on the side of such a movement in the theatre, for their strongest dramatic moments are always those in which they portray essentials. The producers are equally sympathetic, for they perceive that their part in the creation of the dramatic spectacle will be enlarged. The scenic designers look upon the experiment with interest, for they foresee the possibilities of suggestion and indication that are opened up by such a form of drama. A part of the audience is deeply interested, but another part seeks some convenient journalistic label to describe its antipathy, and having found it, leans back in more or less comfortable mood, like the public that groups all modern tendencies in art under the name of "cubism" and so dismisses them with ridicule.

An impulse towards new expression nevertheless persists within the theatre. We may call it, briefly, the will to style. Naturalism at its best is indeed a form of style, but it is the form which lends itself most readily to want of style. The dramatist who takes pen in hand to portray everyday life in everyday speech must be a writer in ten thousand if he is altogether to avoid the rut of ordinary expression. No doubt he always possesses his own individual idiom, but something more than idiomatic distinction is required of him. Style is the intangible mask that he must set upon the face of his apparent reality. The actor's imaginative effort must be as great if he is indeed to transfigure the portrait of character that is offered to him. Let us not appear to disparage such efforts; they are the noblest things the theatre can show. There is no easy way of writing plays or presenting them. There are, however, methods of approach (or, as actors sometimes say, of "attack") that differ fundamentally from the naturalistic method, and contain within themselves the seed that comes to flower in dramatic style. The will to style is a blind impulse of

the theatre which may be given direction by the playwright.

One such way of approach is through the form of the spoken word. The cry for "poetic drama" is in effect a protest against the conventions of the naturalistic theatre, which tend to reduce dramatic dialogue to the level of reporting. Perhaps it marks also a conscious desire of the drama to emphasize its difference from the motion-picture. It is natural that a film-ridden age should feel the need of words. But the power of words in the theatre does not depend upon the forms of classical poetic drama. There was a time when every young dramatist sat down to write his five-act tragedy in blank verse, the composition of which was almost a gentlemanly necessity, like the sowing of other wild oats. That time need never be recalled. Indeed it is better not to speak of poetic drama at all, if the term is only to suggest such exercises in classical versification. Not that the iambic pentameter is dead as a dramatic vehicle. On the contrary, it is very much alive. What is dead is the mythological or historical tragedy, to which alone the use of

verse was supposed to be appropriate. The formalism is dead, but the form survives. Verse-plays will always rank foremost in the spoken as well as in the written drama. The manner of the dramatist's approach to his subject is all-important. A conscious endeavour to write "poetic drama" is likely to cramp his style. But if he can think and feel in dramatic rhythm, he may write of Nebuchadnezzar or the Stock Exchange; it is all one.

An illustration may help to clarify this question of the poetic value of the spoken word. Some modern producers, seeking a fresh interpretation of an ageless play, have presented *Hamlet* in modern dress. There is nothing very remarkable in this convention. The traditional costume of *Hamlet* is rather Elizabethan and contemporary than Danish or mediæval. The Elizabethan audience was accustomed to hearing verse spoken from the stage by actors in contemporary dress. It was even accustomed to seeing Greeks and Romans treated as English citizens or yokels. When the modern producer presents the King and Queen of Denmark in modern evening

attire, with their courtiers sipping coffee or smoking cigarettes, the spectator is at first astonished. But after five minutes these details cease to matter; the main interest is transferred to the manner in which the familiar lines are spoken. Here the producers of *Hamlet* in modern dress make their mistake. They imagine that it is necessary to make verse as nearly as possible resemble prose. They insist upon conversational tones and habitual gestures. They are unable to free themselves from the naturalistic association of trousers and shirt fronts. In the name of modernity the poetic character of the drama is diminished.

These are the faults of the producer and not of the modern setting. The last irony of naturalism is that it should try to make Shakespeare naturalistic. If a new light can be shed upon *Hamlet* by removing it from its traditional setting, well and good. The actor, freed from the ordinary stage trappings of the Prince of Denmark, may very well seize our imagination with fresh vigour. But let us not suppose that dramatic poetry has anything but an absolute value. If we attend an

undress rehearsal of the traditional *Hamlet*, we may find it just as moving as a finished performance. If the play must be produced in modern dress, it would be better to show the public an undress rehearsal in which the actors "let themselves go" rather than a full-dress performance in which the restraint of the drawing-room is imposed upon them. Still we should be grateful to the modernists for their experiment. If it shows us nothing else, it shows at least that changing times and fashions cannot lessen the permanence of words in the theatre. There is but one effective way of speaking dramatic poetry, the way of passion and understanding—not a dozen different ways depending on the mood of the centuries.

A restoration of words to their place in the theatre does not mean a reversion to the drama of the study and the bookshelf. On the contrary, since words are a theatrical symbol, the heightening of their effect brings new life to the stage. The actor thirsts and famishes for lack of words. Of the hundred speeches, long and short, that he must deliver in the course of an evening, how many are

rhythmically and dramatically expressive? Of how many do we feel that they could be written and spoken in one way and no other? How many will be accurately remembered by the listener? One or two, perhaps; the rest might be paraphrased each in a dozen ways no better and no worse than the original. The actor seeks the pointed word, the crystal-line word, the lyrical word, the inevitable word. Can the naturalistic drama offer him these? Seldom indeed.

The will to style expressed in the spoken word—here is evidently a dramatic impulse opposed to the tendencies current in the theatre of yesterday and to-day. But there are other forms in which the will finds expression. The will to style may take shape in dramatic action, in a presentation rather than representation of characters and their movement. The naturalistic drama admittedly does all that can be done to represent apparent reality on the stage. Side by side with the everyday theatre and its drama of common experience, there exists already a theatre of presentation and fantasy. There is the musical play, for example. Whether it be

called grand opera or Savoy opera or musical comedy or *revue*, the musical play is always presentational in character. It does not pretend to portray actual experience, but always aims at a certain impression appropriate to the composer's purpose. There is the Russian Ballet, which has deeply influenced the imagination of the spectator in our own day. It may be said that opera and ballet are not drama, but there is a truer conception of the art of the theatre in such works as *Petrouchka* or *The Three-Cornered Hat* than in a hundred plays of daily life. The musical play preserves the will to style in action, whether the form it takes be sublime or banal.

Now the dramatist may feel impelled to present the essentials of his theme in a form spiritually more akin to that of music-drama or ballet than to that of the ordinary play. He knows (if he be a good dramatist) that a great part of the detail he gives is theatrically of doubtful value. Some of it is even worthless. The precise stage directions and descriptions upon which he lavishes such pains will never be precisely followed; at best they can only serve as rough indications to the producer.

Why should he not seek to concentrate upon the really vital aspects of presentation, excluding the more or less needless details that lend the colour of actuality to his picture? His realistic dialogue, though composed with the utmost care, is bound to contain superfluties that will not "carry" in performance. Why should he not transform and strengthen its character by seeking to give a certain *tempo*, rather than an appearance of accurate reporting, to his dramatic speech? He has to collaborate with the actors who present his play. Why should he not endeavour to make the actor, if only momentarily, the centre of his drama, and offer him a bolder outline of character than is offered by the naturalistic method? When the dramatist sets to work in this way, he is generally called an "expressionist," but the name matters little. The point is that he is a man of the theatre and not only a writer of plays. The will to style is in him.

There are some obvious drawbacks in such a dramatic method. The dramatist is tempted to study types of humanity rather than characters. He may confuse an audience accustomed to

ordinary stage nomenclature by presenting a crowd of unnamed personages whose occupations are the only clue to their identity. The method lends itself to bizarre and "morbid" as well as fantastic uses. The *tempo* is difficult to sustain. If it be once lost, either by author or actors, the play falls flat. This new technique has been practised chiefly by German and American playwrights, whose work may easily be dismissed as experimental. But in so far as the author seeks to present and not to represent, he brings something valuable to the theatre. The stage is truly a platform and not a peep-show. If we regard it only as an author's personal platform, we miss the real significance of theatrical art. The stage is the platform of the selfless artist. The playwright who helps the artist is a good playwright, whether we call him naturalist or expressionist or poet.

It is inevitable that authors seeking new dramatic forms should appear in the guise of critics of the existing theatre. There are many various kinds of critics to be found among the ranks of playwrights. The plays of Pirandello are deeply interesting examples

of presentation, which also contain within themselves a searching analysis of dramatic values. In every country we see groups of dramatists working along lines altogether different from those of their immediate predecessors. We should remember also that throughout the great naturalistic period of modern drama, the naturalists never had it entirely their own way in the theatre. Ibsen, their prophet, was himself a master of symbolical expression. Hauptmann, their chosen leader, has reverted time and again to poetry and fantasy. Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Benavente, Synge, and Claudel have all been dramatists at variance with the general tendencies of the contemporary theatre, if not of their time. The new dramatic forms, perhaps, are not quite so new as they appear to be. But there is no doubt of the age of the naturalistic forms that they seek to replace.

The everyday theatre, although only dimly aware of dramatic movements and their origin, nevertheless feels the uncertainty of changing times. The old subjects have lost their allurements, the old impulses are enfeebled. The playwright cannot manufacture drama at

will, however fertile he may be in plot and dialogue. He must have a faith, though it be only a poor faith, in genteel society, fashionable frocks, eternal triangles and happy endings. And his faith is shaken; he finds that some of the virtue has gone out of these things. The years of war shook the social fabric rudely, and perhaps taught the new audience what not to like. The story-telling type of play, like the story-telling type of Academy picture, is much less popular than it used to be. The narrative drama of stereotyped characters is more vividly and expeditiously presented by the film. The tortured heroines of last generation, who were condemned by their own frailty to social ostracism, begin to take their place among the wax flowers and antimaccassars of Victorian history. Ingenious inventors come forward with mystery plays and "thrillers," which enjoy a passing vogue. Others come forward with "sex" plays, which arouse tiresome controversies without the remotest relation to theatrical art. Others, again, write plays that are designed frankly to exploit the mannerisms and talents of char-

acter actors. The type of brilliant verbal comedy persists by its own merit. At the same time there is a sincere drama of current social life, written by men with sensibility and knowledge of the stage. But in general it is plain that the young dramatist feels no inducement to re-explore the old field of dramatic intrigue. If he has something individual to say, it is only by the happy chance of training or environment that he decides to say it in the theatre. This is what theatrical managers mean when they lament the dearth of plays. The impulse of the theatre is undecided. The movement based upon naturalistic premises has come to a halt. The drama, for the hundredth time in its history, stands at the cross-roads.

Meanwhile the dramatists who should be working within the theatre are working, too often, outside its doors. They write and publish plays, and hope in this way to influence the theatre from without and compel it to accept their work. It often happens that they succeed in impressing themselves upon the theatre in this way. But the dramatist, even more than the stage, is hampered by

yesterday's conventions. His aim may generally be described as self-expression, which is only a part of the aim of the theatre. The dramatist tends to follow other dramatists—not perhaps in the sense of imitation, but with a sense of independence of the world of the stage where all is collaboration and compromise. He is easily persuaded to the fatal opinion that his work is too good for the actor, the producer, or the public. That way lies failure. Mastery of the theatre can never be entirely individual. The dramatist, standing before the strange procession of life, feels the desire to embody his thought in emblems of wit and fancy. The wiseacres of the last generation seek to dissuade him from any such wild adventure. The newspaper men advise him to address his audience in the language that it uses and understands. The theatrical managers, with their knowing nods of ripe experience, assure him that the days of dramatic literature are past. But most insidious of all, the playwrights whisper in his ear the counsel that his art is self-sufficient and he should rely upon himself alone. These are the counsellors to whom he should

resolutely refuse to listen. A collective art is necessarily more difficult of mastery than an individual art. Many imaginative writers have recoiled from what Henry James once termed the "work of falsification" involved in the use of the dramatic form. Many more recoil from the compromises and disillusionments involved in putting plays upon the stage. But all who work in the theatre know that the difficulties are worth surmounting, and all who care for the art of the theatre know that they can never be surmounted by the individual.

The theatre is always greater than the playwright. Strangely enough, the theatre is the last place where this truth is generally understood. Gordon Craig, a man of the theatre, has patiently proclaimed it for a generation, with the result that he is regarded as a wild theorist seeking to deny the actor and the playwright any place in the dramatic scheme of things and to encumber the stage with intolerable masses of scenery. Such is the reward of clear thinking about essentials in a confused world that thinks of details. The difficulty of a collective art, like the art of the theatre, lies always in the need of

collective direction. We have tried to show that the possibilities of such direction exist within the mind of the various craftsmen who contribute to this art. If they seem to be pulling at sixes and sevens—the dramatist asserting his individual and absolute authority, the actor feverishly seeking in his part an image of himself, the producer and designer endeavouring to set their own distinctive stamp upon work that is indifferent to them—they are nevertheless exerting their energies in the same boat. They can never escape each other's company. Sooner or later they must find their rhythm. The theatre seeks order; it craves for common mastery. It is in such a collaboration of craftsmen, and not in the arrival of this or that dramatist or group of dramatists, that we should look for the hope of a dramatic re-birth.

To the theatre men look, not in vain, for the symbols of their own struggles and aspirations. Banner after banner is raised upon the stage, cry after cry echoes through the ranks of the spectators. There are few glimpses of serenity in this conflicting scene. Grief and laughter alike are magnified in

expression; the footsteps of mankind in movement thunder formidably in our ears. Yet there are two different kinds of conflict within the playhouse of to-day. We may reasonably distinguish between the inner conflict of artist with artist and the outer conflict that it is properly the task of the theatre to describe. We may reasonably hope that the birth-pangs of a new drama are now ended. The tortured spirits among the great individual playwrights have had their say. The passionate intensity of their utterance shook the theatre to its foundations. Their resolute will imposed conceptions altogether foreign to the purposes of drama. Their personal figures towered in anarchical fashion above the fabric of the scene. Art for art's sake was brushed aside or talked out of countenance. But the theatre lives by art, and cannot deny its own nature. Art for the theatre's sake must endure.

From the theatre men ask the experience of spiritual adventure—a wide experience which is not to be confined within the boundaries of purely intellectual drama. If the artists of yesterday (the dramatists among

them) withdrew into dignified isolation, it was partly because they felt their own loneliness. They were pioneers of thought, indeed, but they were also single-hearted men hewing their way through forests that obscure the spiritual vision of humanity. They stood alone in their clearings, where they were still surrounded by the darkness that weighs upon the common mind of man. There we find their monuments, and it is natural that we should think of them as solitary workers. But in the theatre no man should be lonely. The theatre seeks wide horizons and fruitful plains. If we believe that the vision of mankind is being steadily enlarged and enriched, we must also believe that the artists of the future, while they share the heritage of the intellectual pioneers, will feel themselves in deeper accord and sympathy with the aspirations of their fellows. The resemblances between men are always greater than the differences. Writers who have gained the freedom of humanity will no longer proclaim from the housetops their dissent from the received opinion of their day. The dramatists, who since the Renaissance of the sixteenth

century have sought their knowledge of the human spirit in themselves, will seek that general harmony which is symbolized within the theatre by the harmony of common craft.

Thus, even while we trace the progress of the dramatist, we return inevitably to the original source of drama in the consciousness of man in movement. The doors of the playhouse are opened to the throng, and the poets contend for the prize. The impulse of the ritual dance throbs in the dramatic spectacle. Here is not only an assemblage of spectators, but a people and a community.

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INDEX

INDEX

(Of Authors and Subjects (not including the
Bibliography.)

- Æschylus, 32-3**
Alfieri, 69
Alley, Edward, 120
American drama, 112-13
d'Annunzio, G., 69
Apron stage, 18, 181
Architecture, Stage, 164-8
Archon, The, 24, 25
Aristo, 68
Aristophanes, 40-1
Aristotle, 57
Austrian drama, 106

Barrie, J. M., 98
Beaumarchais, 81-2
Beaumont, 91
Beque, Henry, 83
Benavente, 71
Berner, Rudolf, 98
Bjornson, 107
Bracegirdle, Mrs., 119
Brahm, Otto, 152
Burbage, Richard, 87, 120
Burlesque, 49
Burns, 164
Breux, 84

Calderon, 71
Capek, Karel, 107

Cervantes, 70
Chapman, 91
Chekhov, 111-12
Chinese drama, 43, 161-2
Chorus, Greek, 15, 30-1
Claudell, 84
Cocteau, Jean, 84
Collier, Jeremy, 94
Comédie Française, 80
Comedy, 38-48
Commedia dell'arte, 46
Congrove, 93
Coquelin, 132
Cornille, 73
Courteline, G., 84
Coward, Noel, 98
Craig, Gordon, 241
Cratichus, 39
Criticism, Dramatic, 214-16

Davies, Gordon, 98
Dekker, 91
Dionysian rites, 15-16, 20-1
Direction, Stage, 141-60
Dramatic unities, 57-9
Drayton, 87
Dryden, 94
Dumas the Elder, 82

- Dumas the Younger, 82-3
 Duse, Eleanora, 133, 137
 Echegaray, 71
 English drama, 86-98
 Ervine, St John, 98
 Etherege, 92
 Euripides, 36-7
 Farce, 48
 Farquhar, 94
Fastnachtsspiele, 98
Faust, 102
 Fielding, 94
 Fitch, Clyde, 113
 Fletcher, 91
 Ford, 91
 Freie Buhne, 105
 French Drama, 71-85
 Galli-Bibiena, G., 165
 Galsworthy, John, 97
 Garnier, 72
 Garrick, David, 119
 German drama, 98-106
 Gilbert and Sullivan opera, 49
 Giraudoux, Jean, 84
 Goethe, 101-3
 Gogol, 111
 Goldoni, 69
 Goldsmith, 94-5
 Gorky, 111
 Gottsched, 99
 Gozzi, Carlo, 69
 Granville-Barker, H., 97, 151
 Greek drama, 29-42
 Greene, 86
 Griboyedov, 111
 Grillparzer, 104
 Guitry, Sacha, 84
Hamlet, Staging of, 177-82, 230-2
 Hankin, St John, 97
 Hardy, Alex., 72
 Hauptmann, 105
 Hebbel, 104
 Heywood, 91
 History, as dramatic form, 51
 Hofmannsthal, H. von, 106
 Houghton, Stanley, 97
 Howard, Bronson, 113
 Hrotswitha, 42
 Hugo, Victor, 82
 Ibsen, 107-9
 Indian drama, 42-3
 Irving, 119
 Italian drama, 68-70
 Japanese drama, 43
 Jodelle, 72
 Jones, H. A., 96
 Jonson, Ben, 91
 Jordan, Mrs., 119
 Kaiser, G., 106
 Kataev, Valentin, 112
 Kean, 119
 Kemble, 119
 Kleist, H. von, 104
 Kotzebue, 104
 Kyd, 86
 Larivey, P. de, 72
 Lecouvreur, Adrienne, 121

- Lee, 94
- Lenormand, H R., 84
- Lessing, 101
- Little Theatre movement, 214
- Lodge, 87
- Lope de Vega, 70-1
- Lyly, 86
- Lytton, 95

- Machiavelli, 68
- Macready, 119
- Maeterlinck, 84
- Marivaux, 80
- Marlowe, 87
- Marston, 91
- Masefield, John, 97
- Masques, 55-6
- Massinger, 91
- Maugham, Somerset, 98
- Melodrama, 49-51
- mander, 42
- Middleton, 91
- Miracle plays, 55
- Molière, 75-80
- Monkhouse, Allan, 97
- Morality plays, 55
- Moscow Art Theatre, 111, 152
- Motion-pictures, 219-20
- Mysteries, Medieval, 55

- Naturalism in drama, 152, 222-4
- Nietzsche, 29
- Norwegian drama, 107-9

- O'Casey, Sean, 98
- Edipus, 15, 34-5
- O'Neill, Eugene, 113

- Ostrovsky, 111
- Otway, 94

- Pantomime, 45
- Passion plays, 55
- Peele, 86
- Phèdre, 75
- Pinero, 95-6
- Pirandello, 69-70

- Racine, 74-5
- Rehearsal, 145-6
- Reinhardt, Max, 152
- Religious drama, 54, 55
- Renaissance, The, 62-5
- Repertory theatres, 193-7
- Restoration drama, 92-4
- Robertson, 95
- Romans, Jules, 84
- Roman theatre, 38, 42
- Rostand, 84
- Rotrou, 72
- Rowley, 91
- Russian ballet, 110, 234
- Russian drama, 110-12

- Sachs, Hans, 99
- Sarcey, 60
- Sardou, 82
- Scandinavian drama, 107-110
- Schiller, 103-4
- Schnitzler, 106
- Scribe, 82
- Seneca, 38
- Shakespeare, 88-90
- Shakespearean acting, 123
- Shaw, Bernard, 96-7
- Sheridan, 95
- Sherriff, R O., 98

- Siddons, Mrs , 119
 Sierra, 71
 Social drama, 52-3
 Sophocles, 33-6
 Spanish drama, 70-71 -
 Stage lighting, 157-8, 174-6
 Stanislavsky, 152
 Strindberg, 109-10
 Sudermann, 105
 Sumarokov, 110
 Swedish drama, 109-10
 Synge, 98

 Tairov, Alex., 152
 Talma, 119
 Tasso, 69
 Tchekoff, 111-12
 Terence, 42

 Théâtre Libre, 83-4
 Thespis, 31
 Thomas, Augustus, 113
 Toller, Ernst, 106
 Tolstoy, 111
 Tragedy, 31-8

 Unities, Dramatic, 57-9

 Vanbrugh, 94
 Vandeville, 49
 Vildrac, Charles, 84
 Voltaire, 81

 Webster, 91
 Wedekind, 105
 Wilde, 96
 Wycherley, 93

